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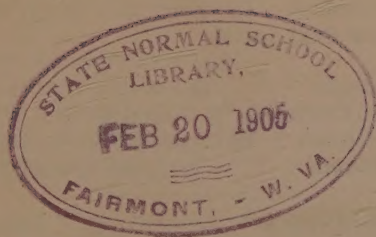




# Great Commanders

*EDITED BY JAMES GRANT WILSON*

ADMIRAL PORTER



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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, NEW YORK.







*David D Porter*

GREAT COMMANDERS



# ADMIRAL PORTER

BY

JAMES RUSSELL SOLEY

FORMERLY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY



*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS*

NEW YORK  
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
1903

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## PREFACE

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NOTWITHSTANDING the high place which Admiral Porter fills in our naval annals, the record of his life has never before been written. The present work was undertaken in fulfilment of his wish. In addition to the official documents and correspondence which form the basis of the work, the writer has availed himself, when practicable, of the published narratives of officers who took part in the Civil War. Many of the events referred to were also the subject of conversation and discussion with the Admiral himself during the last years of his life.

The writer wishes to express his thanks to many kind friends in the service, who have aided him greatly with advice and suggestions, and in some cases with facts drawn from their personal experience. It is impossible to name all of them, but he would particularly mention his obligations to Rear-Admirals Greer, Walker, Ramsay, and Selfridge, who were with Admiral Porter in the Mississippi, and also to Rear-Admiral Bartlett, and Captains Chadwick and Emory. He is particularly indebted to the kind assistance of Mr. Charles W. Stewart, the superintendent of the Naval War Record Office.

NEW YORK, *September 1, 1903.*

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# ADMIRAL PORTER

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## CHAPTER I

### THE FAMILY TRADITION

So closely and clearly were Admiral Porter's character and career foreshadowed by those of his immediate ancestors that no account of his life would be complete which gave them only a passing allusion.

The Porter family came of good old Massachusetts stock, and had followed the sea for generations. The admiral's great-grandfather, Alexander Porter, born in Massachusetts in 1727, was a merchant captain, and had served in the colonial wars. His two sons were also bred to the sea, and at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War both sought active service. The elder of the two, David, was the admiral's grandfather. His first service was in privateers, one of which, the sloop *Delight*, he commanded in 1778. In 1780 he was commissioned a captain in the State navy of Massachusetts, in which Preble and other officers who afterward entered the regular navy first won distinction, and was given command of the ten-gun ship *Aurora*. Upon one of his cruises he was captured and for some time confined in the Jersey prison ship. Here he found his brother Samuel, who had been wounded and captured in another engagement, and who shortly after died of his wounds on board the Jersey. Making his escape from the prison ship after his brother's death,



David Porter returned to service and continued active cruising until the end of the war.

After peace was established Captain Porter commanded a ship in the West India trade. On one of his voyages his vessel, while lying at Jeremie, in Santo Domingo, was boarded by a press-gang from a British man-of-war. Porter armed his men, and after a short and sharp struggle drove the intruders from the ship with considerable loss. He was not again molested. His courage and spirit on this occasion were rewarded by an appointment as sailing-master in the reconstructed navy, and he was placed in charge of the signal-station at Federal Hill, Baltimore, whither he removed from Boston with his family.

After several years passed at Baltimore, Captain Porter was ordered to the naval station at New Orleans, of which his son was then in command, and here he spent the closing years of his life. His death, which occurred in 1808, was the result of a sunstroke. One circumstance connected with the accident had a peculiar and vital bearing on the history of the navy. It happened when the captain was fishing on Lake Pontchartrain. He was in a boat alone, and was found in an exhausted condition by George Farragut, also a sailing-master in the navy, who was living on the shore of the lake. The captain was taken by Mr. Farragut to the latter's house, where, in spite of the devoted care of his host, he died not long after. It was in recognition of this act of kindness that Mr. Farragut's young son, David Glasgow Farragut, then a child seven years old, was adopted as a member of the Porter family, and through their influence was a few years later appointed a midshipman in the navy. Captain Porter left two sons, both of whom had become naval officers. John Porter en-

tered the navy in 1806, and died a commander in 1831. The other son, David, was the famous Commodore Porter of the War of 1812, and the father of the future admiral.

David Porter the younger was born in Boston in 1780, in the midst of the Revolutionary struggle. The months preceding his birth were for his father months of ceaseless effort and arduous toil battling with the enemies of the country, and no less with the forces of Nature—a life to develop courage, nerve, mental resource, and physical vigor—all, in short, that goes to make up the most virile energy. For his mother, too, the time was one to arouse and call into action all her fortitude, self-reliance, and force of character. No doubt this environment of the parents had its influence in shaping the natural tendencies of their offspring. Certain it is that from an early age the boy showed all those qualities of mind and character which might have been looked for under the circumstances surrounding his birth, and as he grew in years he fulfilled the promise of his boyhood. When sixteen years of age he was taken by his father to the West Indies. On this voyage he not only learned the rudiments of the sailor's occupation, but he got his first taste of fighting in the encounter at Jeremie with the British man-of-war boat. The feeling of personal antipathy which he conceived at this time for everything British—a feeling quite distinct and apart from the sentiment of hostility for all public enemies, and not unlike the feeling which the English sailors of Drake's day entertained for everything Spanish—remained with him through life.

Young Porter made two other voyages to the West Indies in merchant vessels. On both it was his ill luck to be impressed into British ships-of-war, from which he

seized the first opportunity to escape. In one of these escapes he took refuge on board a Danish brig, in which he worked his passage to Europe, where he arrived destitute and forlorn, and at last shipped in a foreign vessel bound for America. These experiences did not tend to lessen his hostility toward Great Britain, and especially toward the British navy, which at this time he rightly enough regarded as being the inveterate enemy and persecutor of the American sailor. The logic of circumstances, no less than his natural inclinations, led him to seek employment in the navy, which was just then in process of reconstruction, and on the 16th of April, 1798, he received his warrant as a midshipman.

At this particular moment the political leanings of the Adams administration, together with the aggressive policy of the French Directory, had brought about a crisis in our relations with France which threw British encroachments temporarily into the background. We could not fight both the western European powers at once, and recent French spoliations at sea and the indignities offered to our envoys at Paris emphasized the Federalist theory that France was more inimical to the United States than Great Britain. Three new frigates, the *Constitution*, *United States*, and *Constellation*, had recently been built for the protection of our Mediterranean commerce against the Algerine and Tripolitan corsairs, and three more were in process of construction. A Navy Department was organized, acts were passed authorizing the seizure of French armed vessels, and a fleet, composed in part of ships built for war but mainly of converted merchantmen, was sent to the West Indies to prosecute active hostilities against France. By the next winter this fleet, which had been created out of nothing,

amounted to over thirty ships, mounting upward of six hundred guns.

It was fortunate for young Porter that his first cruise was made in such a ship as the *Constellation*, with such a captain as Truxtun, and such a first lieutenant as John Rodgers. The officers of the navy at this early period had been hurriedly collected from the merchant service. Many of them were ignorant and incompetent, few had any clear notion of naval discipline, and drunkenness, insubordination, and acts of petty tyranny were of frequent occurrence. The memoirs of Commodore Morris, who entered the navy at the same time, give a clear picture of the state of affairs as it then existed. It affords a striking illustration of the prevailing demoralization, that one night, when Porter was midshipman of the watch, the officer of the deck, who was drunk, after heaping him with abusive epithets struck him in the face, whereupon Porter knocked him down; and not the least striking part of it is that such a captain as Truxtun condoned Porter's offense. The Peace Establishment Act, passed three years later, retired two-thirds of the navy list to private life, and thus relieved the service of the incompetent and undisciplined officers who had entered in 1798. Those who were selected for retention, with very few exceptions, were men of superior character and ability. Certainly no naval service ever showed a higher level of courage, skill, and devotion to duty, or a larger proportion of commanding officers of surpassing merit, than the United States navy in the wars of the next fifteen years.

Porter was fortunate in his ship, not only because the *Constellation* was one of the best vessels we then had, but also because upon this cruise she fought and won the first of that brilliant series of frigate actions which

formed the especial pride and glory of the navy during the early period of its history. The capture of the *Insurgente* was in no respect inferior as an achievement to the more famous successes of the War of 1812, except in so far as it was believed, and doubtless correctly, that any British ship of that day could whip any French ship of her class. The fight was hotly contested, and ended in a complete victory for the American. During the action Porter was in charge of the foretop. The foretopmast was badly injured by the enemy's shot, and Porter, being unable to get any answer from the deck to his repeated hails, took upon himself the responsibility of cutting the halyards and letting the yard come down on the mast, thus saving the mast. After the action he assisted Rodgers, the first lieutenant, in taking possession of the captured frigate. Before the prisoners could be transferred a gale came on, and the two ships were separated. Thus it happened that Rodgers and Porter, with a boat's crew of a dozen men, found themselves in charge of a captured frigate, in a gale of wind, with some two hundred prisoners, who knew the weakness of their guards and who were ready to seize any opportunity to retake the ship. The Frenchmen were sent below and sentries were stationed at the hatches with orders to shoot any man who attempted to come up, and for three sleepless days and nights the two young officers sailed the ship and held their prisoners in check, at last bringing their prize safely in to St. Kitts. This exploit, hardly to be paralleled in naval history either before or since, gave both the lieutenant and the midshipman who conducted it a distinction in the rising service which they maintained to the end of their career. Eight months later Porter received his commission as lieutenant.

About this time the Navy Department completed the construction of two small but remarkably efficient vessels, the schooners *Enterprise* and *Experiment*, especially adapted for the West India service. No vessels in the squadron were more actively and usefully employed, and no others equaled them in constant and successful activity. As first lieutenant of the *Experiment*, Porter took part in many engagements, sometimes with the enemy, sometimes with the freebooters, or picaroons, which then infested the Spanish Main. In one of these desperate encounters, when his captain gave up the ship as lost, Porter took the command himself, ignoring his superior, and fought the battle to a successful issue.

In 1801 the Tripolitan War broke out, and Porter once more found himself in the midst of active operations. Three squadrons were sent out in succession. The first was commanded by Commodore Richard Dale, a veteran who, as lieutenant of the *Bon Homme Richard*, had fought by the side of Paul Jones in the Revolution, but it was restricted in its action by the narrow scope of the President's orders. According to Jefferson's theory of constitutional powers, the Executive could not recognize a war as existing until it was formally declared by Congress, although a foreign state had declared war against the United States and was prosecuting the most active and aggressive hostilities. The squadron could therefore do little but maintain the defensive, and the only pitched battle was fought by the *Enterprise*, under Sterrett, of which Porter was now the first lieutenant. In this fight a Tripolitan man-of-war polacca was captured, but the victors, in view of the constitutional restriction, were under the ridiculous necessity of abandoning the prize they had won and letting her return at leisure to Tripoli—an illustration of the theory of strict

construction of the *Constitution* which it is to be hoped was appreciated by the Barbary pasha.

The next year a larger squadron was sent out, and Porter became first lieutenant of the flagship, the *New York*. The fleet had now ample powers, but the inertness of the new commander-in-chief made the cruise rather barren of results. Porter, as usual, distinguished himself, leading a party of volunteers which attacked a position of the enemy at Old Tripoli, and burning the vessels lying in the harbor. In this affair he was twice wounded.

The third squadron was that which Preble commanded in the *Constitution*, and its campaign ultimately resulted in putting an end to the war. In this squadron Porter served as first lieutenant on board the *Philadelphia*, under the command of Captain Bainbridge. The story of the grounding of that famous frigate on the rocks at the entrance of the harbor of Tripoli, whither the zeal and overconfidence of her brilliant captain had carried her, is well known. For more than a year and a half Bainbridge and his officers, including Porter, remained prisoners at Tripoli, and they only obtained their freedom upon the signing of the treaty of June 3, 1805. After his liberation Porter cruised for some months in the Mediterranean in command of the *Enterprise*. Upon his return home, in 1808, he was appointed to the command of the naval station at New Orleans, then an important post, which he filled with credit for two years. After a short interval he was assigned to the command of the frigate *Essex*, and here we find him at the outbreak of the War of 1812.

However much may have been said or written of the War of 1812, it is not easy to do justice to that extraordinary series of naval successes. Whatever may be the



achievements of our navy in its future wars, it will always turn to this as the period which created its heroic traditions and set for all time the standard of successful endeavor. When the war began the British navy numbered a thousand ships, half of which were in commission, and among these last were more than a hundred ships of the line, of which the frigates and sloops were regarded as mere auxiliaries. Its successive victories, which had literally extinguished the navies of all its maritime rivals—of the Dutch at Camperdown, the Danes at Copenhagen, the French at Ushant and Aboukir, the Spaniards at St. Vincent, and finally of the French and Spanish allies at Trafalgar—had given it a prestige which seemingly placed it beyond the range of hostile attacks. Never was there a more colossal audacity than that which prompted the United States to engage in a naval war with such a power. Its fleet numbered in all nineteen vessels, not one of which was a battle-ship, and only eight were even frigates. Yet in the first eight months six pitched battles were fought, in every one of which the Americans won a complete and decisive victory, and this was the result of every engagement of single ships, with but two exceptions, during the whole war. There were no fleet engagements, except those on the lakes—in both of which the enemy were defeated—because there were no American fleets at sea to engage. The cruises of our frigates were long voyages in search of antagonists wherever the seas might bear them—roving cruises like those of Drake and Raleigh and Hawkins and Grenville to the Spanish Main. Their material results in reducing the numerical strength of the British navy were insignificant, but their moral effect in showing that the diminutive transatlantic state could hold its own in sea-fights against the greatest naval power of the world was tremendous;



while they no doubt inflicted, in combination with the privateers, which their success encouraged, a serious blow upon the enemy's commerce, and accomplished the object of the war by putting a stop to impressment.

Among these romantic and brilliant cruises none was more successful than that of Porter in the *Essex*. She was only a second-class frigate, but her cruise was victorious from the beginning. She had been out but two days when she fell in with a British convoy, from which she succeeded in cutting out a troop-ship. A day or two later she encountered the sloop of war *Alert*, and after a short engagement captured her. The *Alert* was no match for the *Essex*, but the engagement was the first in the series of successful actions between single ships during the opening months of the war, and it at once brought the victorious captain into prominence. After taking several more prizes the *Essex* returned to the Delaware, and Porter repaired to his home. The frigate was then refitted for an extended cruise in the Pacific.

To the vessels of the United States navy the Pacific Ocean was at this time an almost unknown cruising ground. We had no port upon its shores. The countries on the west coast of South America were still provinces of Spain, and in general unfriendly to the United States. The sea was occupied chiefly by American and British whalers. The American whaling fleet represented what was in those days a large amount of capital. It was now at the mercy of the enemy. The British whalers in the Pacific were fitted out as privateers, while the Americans were unarmed. Unless a ship of war could be sent out to protect them, all the American whale-ships were sure to fall an easy prey.

The first intention of the Government had been to send to the Pacific a squadron of three vessels—the Con-

stitution, under Bainbridge, the sloop *Hornet*, under Lawrence, and the *Essex*. The *Constitution* and the *Hornet*, however, were detained on the coast of Brazil by the actions which resulted in the capture of the *Java* and the destruction of the *Peacock*, and never reached their destined cruising ground. Porter, after capturing on the way out an English packet with enough specie on board to keep him in funds for the rest of the cruise, proceeded on his voyage alone, and arrived at Valparaiso in March, 1813. His coming was entirely unexpected, and none of the enemy's ships of war were in the neighborhood, but the American whalers in the Pacific were being plundered at leisure by their British rivals.

Porter made his headquarters at the Galapagos Islands, and within four months after his arrival had captured every British whaler and privateer in the Pacific. In this short time he had obtained undisputed possession of the sea, and in addition to the *Essex* he had an efficient fleet of nearly a dozen captured privateers, all more or less armed.

He now retired to the Marquesas, of which he took possession in the name of the United States. Here he refitted his ships and occupied his crews in wars with the natives. Returning in the following winter to Valparaiso, he found there two British ships of war, the *Phoebe* and the *Cherub*, which the enemy's government had sent out expressly to capture him. Compelled to engage them under disadvantageous circumstances, he fought a desperate and protracted battle, in which, after the loss of nearly all of his crew, he was forced to surrender.

The cruise of the *Essex* rightly gave Porter a place among the foremost of the naval heroes of the war. To have been able to take possession of the Pacific, and

to hold it for a year without assistance or supplies from home; to support himself from his captured prizes; to protect efficiently an important and valuable industry on the verge of destruction; to capture no less than a dozen of the enemy's armed vessels, and to do all this on his own unaided responsibility, without direction or command other than the general orders under which he sailed, was rightly regarded as an achievement of no ordinary magnitude. The fact that at its close the *Essex* was captured by an overwhelming force did not take away from the splendor of his success. Although it ended in defeat, no action in which the navy ever took part was contested with greater judgment and skill, or with more stubborn tenacity and courage.

Nor is the fact without significance, as an indication of the kind of captain who commanded the *Essex*, that she carried on this cruise a midshipman, a mere child indeed, but one who was destined one day to reach the highest point of professional greatness, and who here received his first, it might be said his only, early lesson in naval war. Great as was Farragut's native genius as a naval officer, he no doubt owed much to the accident which placed him, as a boy of thirteen, a midshipman in the *Essex*, and to the vigilant and friendly eye that watched over his first professional training. It is no slight testimony to the merits of the elder Porter that the two men who have won by their own successes the highest rank in our navy were his sons, one by blood, the other by adoption, and both by the fatherly care and example with which he implanted in them his own lofty standard of professional character and effort.

At the close of the war Porter was appointed a member of the supervisory council of naval administration which had recently been created by statute, and which

was known as the Board of Navy Commissioners. With him on the board were associated Rodgers and Hull, and to these three officers fell the task of supervising the principal details of naval administration during the important period of development following the War of 1812. In 1822 Commodore Porter resigned from the board and was appointed to the command of the squadron then engaged in the suppression of piracy in the West Indies.

It was while in this command that Porter became involved in the unfortunate affair of Fajardo. One of his officers, searching for pirates who had made a raid upon St. Thomas, landed at the town of Fajardo, in Porto Rico, and was ill treated by the local authorities. Porter resented the affront and determined to punish the offenders. He accordingly landed with a large force, captured the fort, and remained in possession until the authorities of the town had made the most abject apologies. The Government could not overlook this high-handed demonstration, committed by its own officer in the territory of a foreign and friendly state, and Porter was recalled and a court-martial was ordered. No very serious consequences might have resulted from the trial had it not been for some letters published by Porter on his return from the station, whose tone bordered on insubordination. He was tried on both charges, found guilty, and sentenced to six months' suspension.

Porter's proud and sensitive nature rebelled even at this not very severe sentence, and he made up his mind to resign from the navy. His intention was generally known, and presently overtures were made to him by the Mexican government, with a view to putting him at the head of the navy which it was then forming. For many years the Mexicans had been in revolt against Spain, and they had prepared extensive plans of naval

development with a view to the vigorous prosecution of hostilities, especially against Cuba. Porter went to Mexico, and, after satisfying himself of the condition of affairs there, accepted the offer.

Porter remained in the Mexican service for three years. The first year was passed in preparing his ships and in organizing and disciplining the force that was to man them. It was a thankless task. The Mexicans had no aptitude for the sea, and did not readily submit to Porter's discipline. The American and English officers on whom he chiefly relied were looked upon as intruders, and there was no disposition to sustain them in their efforts. The capital was a center of intrigue, and the government was at the mercy of whatever cabal or petty faction was uppermost for the moment. The attempts of Porter and his officers to introduce and enforce strict regulations were looked upon by the officials with jealousy and distrust, and by the crews with suppressed hostility. The second year Porter spent in cruising, chiefly in the neighborhood of Key West. His crews were now in fairly good condition, although they had only been brought to it by unremitting effort. His third year was a period of inaction at Vera Cruz, where the fleet was laid up. At the end of this time, finding that he could accomplish little against the intrigues by which he was surrounded, and having lost his nephew, who had been his main reliance and who was killed while in command of the *Guerrero*, he resigned his commission and returned to the United States.

His warmest friends were now at the head of the Government, President Jackson being especially cordial in his demonstrations of favor. He was offered one position after another, and finally selected that of consul-general at Algiers. Shortly after he reached his post,

Algiers became a French dependency, and Porter was appointed *chargé d'affaires*, and afterward minister, to Turkey. He remained at Constantinople for twelve years, filling creditably the not very exacting demands of the position, and died at his post in 1843.

Among the many able and gallant men who gave distinction to the navy during the early period of its history, none is entitled to greater credit than Commodore Porter. From the first moment of his entry into the navy he showed the true qualities of a sea-fighter. His remarkable fertility of resource, his untiring energy, his rapid judgment, his iron nerve and endurance, formed a combination of qualities which made him a typical naval officer. As a young man there certainly was no better lieutenant in the navy. As a captain his surpassing excellence required no greater proof than his daring and successful cruise in the Pacific—a cruise that recalls more vividly than any other of the war the exploits of the Tudor captains in the old Anglo-Spanish hostilities. As an administrator, while in the office of Navy Commissioner, he showed marked ability, and his success in organizing the Mexican navy was another evidence of his professional skill and indomitable perseverance under the most adverse circumstances. His faults, like his virtues, were those of a masterful and impetuous nature. Generous and gallant as he was, he was quick to imagine and to resent an affront, whether it came from a foreign state or from his military superior. Such a tendency, unless kept under careful restraint, as it had been during the earlier years of Porter's career, is full of danger in a service like the navy, where subordination and obedience and a due regard for the rights of others are the first law of discipline; and after the court-martial Porter's only course was to bow to its rebuke, or to withdraw from the service.

Commodore Porter had six sons, one of whom died under his father's command in the Mexican service; the second entered the army and was killed in battle during the war with Mexico; and the other four became officers of the navy.



## CHAPTER II

### IN THE MEXICAN SERVICE

DAVID DIXON PORTER was born on the 8th of June, 1813, at Chester, Pennsylvania. His birth took place ten months after the victory over the *Alert*, and while the *Essex* was still away in the Pacific. The same influences that surrounded the birth of the father, and seemed, as it were, to shape his future character and career, were present at that of the son, and seem in like manner to have foreshadowed his remarkable destiny, and to have planted in him the seeds of those qualities which could only reach their full fruition in storm and in battle.

It was more than a year after his birth before his father could hear of the event, and, returning home from his successful cruise in the Pacific, could look upon the face of this child, who was destined in the fulness of time to achieve a fame even greater than his own. Lingered for a few days at home, the commodore was shortly called again into active service for the defense of Washington, then attacked by the enemy. In command of a battery on the Potomac he did his best to oppose the withdrawal of the British, with whose vessels he was hotly engaged. This duty over, he was able at length to return for a period of rest to his home and his family.

Like most of his companions in arms, Commodore Porter had reached the highest grade in the service and

had performed the most arduous and responsible naval duties while still a young man. He was only thirty-five years old when the war ended, and he was by no means the youngest captain on the navy list. Upon receiving his appointment to the Board of Navy Commissioners he purchased a large tract of land on Meridian Hill, the northern suburb of Washington, and built a comfortable house, where his family lived for many years. Here David Porter passed the greater part of his boyhood.

At this time the navy was the most popular branch of the public service, and its popularity was heightened by comparison with the army. It had given the country during the war an almost unbroken succession of victories on the ocean and the lakes, while the campaigns of the army, with one or two exceptions, had been one long history of incompetency and disaster. Of the young captains of 1812, and the still younger lieutenants, many were stationed in Washington, while all were obliged to go there more or less frequently by the nature of their duties. They were welcome guests at Porter's hospitable house, and from them, as he grew older, young David heard again and again the story of the great battles of the War of 1812. Here he acquired his first knowledge of the character and career of a naval officer. Here his first ideals were created, and here he formed that attachment for the profession that was to be his ruling passion throughout his life.

It is no wonder that with such influences surrounding him, as soon as the opportunity presented itself, young Porter was taken by his father on a cruise in a ship of war. He was ten years old at the time, and the commodore was in the last year of his command of the West India squadron. The cruise did not last long, being terminated six months later by the commodore's recall in

consequence of the disastrous expedition to Fajardo. Then followed a year of controversy, ending in the court-martial, which induced the high-tempered commodore to throw up his commission and to enter the Mexican service.

When Commodore Porter resolved to go to Mexico in April, 1826, he took with him a surgeon and a secretary. He was also accompanied by his nephew, Lieutenant David H. Porter, of the navy, a most gallant and capable young officer, the son of his sister Anne, who had married her cousin, Alexander Porter. Besides these, he had with him his two sons, David, the future admiral, and Thomas, who were then respectively twelve and ten years old. The two boys were at first placed at school in the city of Mexico, and later entered as midshipmen in the Mexican navy, where Thomas, the younger, shortly after died of yellow fever.

The Spaniards at this time had a powerful squadron in the Gulf of Mexico, commanded by Commodore Laborde, with headquarters at Havana. Porter's squadron consisted of the *Libertad*, an old frigate of no great size, and three brigs. This force, which he had organized with the utmost difficulty and had at last brought into a high state of discipline, put to sea in March, 1827, with the intention of cruising against Spanish commerce. After making several captures of merchant vessels, Porter, being too inferior in force to attempt to cope with Laborde, put in to Key West. During the next nine months he used this port as a base of operations, and being familiar with every shoal and passage at the entrance of the harbor, he was able to send out his light brigs even when the main entrance was blockaded by Laborde with a heavy force of frigates. Many captures were made in this way by Porter and his flying cruisers.

In the spring of 1828 he evaded the blockade and put in once more at Vera Cruz.

Long before the squadron left Key West Commodore Porter had decided that it was time that his son should see active service, and he accordingly determined to send him on a roving cruise. The story of this cruise may be told nearly in the admiral's own words. Two schooners, originally built in Maine, had been brought in as prizes to Key West, loaded with coffee and sugar. One of these, named the *Esmeralda*, was now fitted out by the commodore and the command was given to his nephew, Lieutenant David H. Porter, who had up to this time been captain of the *Libertad*. With him, as second in command, was an old Mexican lieutenant of marines, and young David Porter went as midshipman of the schooner. The crew was composed of twenty-seven men, mostly Mexicans. The *Esmeralda* was a craft of about one hundred and fifty tons and a dull sailer, but she was fairly well suited for her purpose, the commodore's plan being to send her to raid the coast of Cuba and to capture such merchant vessels as might be found there.

The *Esmeralda* sailed from Key West at midnight, hoping to run the blockade in the darkness. At daylight she was about ten miles to the southward of the harbor, and suddenly discovered that the Spanish squadron of blockade was in sight and bearing down upon her. Hastily improvising an American flag, Lieutenant Porter decided, as the only safe course, to run his schooner through the squadron. Had the Spaniards been keeping a sharp lookout, they would have seen the fourteen-oared launch on the schooner's deck, which would certainly have revealed her character, but they let her pass without molesting her. Running over to the south coast

of Cuba, Porter threaded his way along the numerous bays and inlets that cut up the shore, and finally put in at Broa. Leaving a small force in charge of the schooner, he took the rest of the crew in during the night in the launch and found in the harbor a number of vessels at anchor awaiting convoys, most of them being filled up with coffee and sugar. A train of mules loaded with coffee had just arrived. The party landed from the launch, the muleteers were seized, and the coffee transferred to the vessels lying at the dock. The crews were secured and the vessels themselves were taken out to the Esmeralda, which received their cargoes on board and promptly scuttled the prizes.

On the next day the Esmeralda got under way and ran down to the Isle of Pines, and that night sent the launch in again and captured four more prizes. These were taken out and their cargoes again transferred to the schooner, which was now loaded so full that she could hold no more. Three of the captured vessels were sunk, a small clipper-built schooner being retained as a tender. The prizes were good enough vessels, and would have sold well at Vera Cruz, but the commodore's orders had been to burn, sink, and destroy, and the order was carried out. Another night raid was made soon after at Cienfuegos, where the launch was again sent in and brought out a schooner, which, as usual, was sunk. At this place the Mexican crew landed and took occasion to gratify their instincts of plunder.

The captain of the Esmeralda had been brought up under the severest discipline of the United States navy, and though only twenty-one years of age, was a thorough martinet of the old school. Punishments were of daily occurrence on board the schooner, and the Mexicans, who were already disaffected toward their

American officers, soon developed a spirit of mutiny. After leaving Cienfuegos, while running down to the Isle of Pines, a strange ship came in sight and the arms were served out to the Mexican crew. As the stranger proved to be French, however, the arms were presently returned. Young Porter, now performing duty as midshipman, had charge of the arms, and when they were turned in he noticed that several muskets and cartridges and all the bayonets were missing. Other circumstances aroused his suspicions and led him to the belief that the crew were on the verge of mutiny. Captain Porter heard the boy's story and decided on summary measures. He immediately went on deck, after directing the midshipman to stand at the cabin door with his cutlass and pistols and be ready to hand them to him. When the captain reached the deck he noticed the carpenter, an Englishman who was one of the most ill-disposed of the crew, standing forward, with an axe in his hand, surrounded by the Mexicans, to whom he was talking excitedly, frequently pointing toward the quarter-deck. Porter called out to him to come aft, whereupon the carpenter made a rush at the captain with his uplifted axe, followed by the rest of the crew. But Porter was too quick for him, and taking his cutlass from the midshipman, cut down the mutineer before he could use his weapon. The leading Mexican received a shot through the head, and the rest retreated forward, pursued by one or two of the crew who had remained loyal. The Mexicans were then ordered aft and made to stand in line, the captain covering them with his pistols cocked and ready to shoot the first man that moved. On examination, all were found to be armed with bayonets concealed down their backs. The mutineers were quickly put in irons. This left only the quartermaster and two American seamen, besides the

officers, to work the vessel, and it put a stop to any further raids upon Spanish commerce.

The captain's method of securing his mutinous crew and bringing them back to Key West was in keeping with the prevailing practice of naval discipline at that period. Running into a wooded bay on the shores of a secluded island, he deliberated what course to pursue. He could not land the men on the island, where they would certainly starve to death, but it was necessary for his safety and that of the other officers that they should be well secured. Two holes for each man were sawed through the deck of the schooner on each side of the cabin beam. The prisoners' feet were put down through the holes and irons put on them below. As the forty-eight feet protruded into the cabin through the deck, no one could interfere with the irons without the knowledge of the captain. This, as Porter in his narrative naively suggests, "was a simple expedient, but a very happy one, at least to the officers." In this condition the *Esmeralda* made her way back to Key West, where she again passed unobserved through the Spanish squadron. Her cargo, which was sold at Key West, produced some fifty thousand dollars, and again the squadron was in funds. The mutineers were tried by court-martial, and sent to work on the fortress of San Juan at Vera Cruz.

The success of the *Esmeralda's* cruise now led the commodore to more extended operations. The coast of Cuba offered excellent opportunities for predatory warfare, and no form of hostilities could do more to injure the Spaniards in that quarter or to give them a distaste for the war. There being no inland communication on the island, the coffee and sugar from the plantations were sent in small coasting schooners from the minor seaports



to Havana, where they were collected and shipped in seagoing vessels. The cargoes of the schooners were small, but of great value, and in fact it was mainly to attack and plunder this commerce that the Mexican navy had been organized.

With a view to carrying out his plans, Commodore Porter now fitted out the brig *Guerrero*, the best vessel at this time in the Mexican navy. She had been built in the United States by Henry Eckford, and although of no great size and carrying only twenty-two guns, she was a fast sailer and in every way an efficient cruiser. She was placed under the command of Captain David H. Porter, who took with him an Englishman, named Williams, as first lieutenant, an American second lieutenant, and the best Mexican officers that could be found. The commodore's son again went with his cousin as midshipman. The crew was composed chiefly of English and Americans, with a few picked Mexicans and a carefully selected guard of Mexican marines. The Mexicans, although making poor sailors, were capital soldiers, and had a native fondness for fighting.

The *Guerrero* sailed from Vera Cruz about the middle of March, 1828, with instructions to follow the same general plan which had been successfully carried out by the *Esmeralda*, and having fair winds, she arrived off the coast of Cuba toward the end of the month. Relying upon information given by an American brig that there was no available force at the time in Havana—which, unhappily, proved not to be true—Porter decided to steer for Mariel, thirty miles west of Havana, intending to pass the city in the night and to attack the coasters coming up from the eastward.

Porter had no sooner arrived in the neighborhood of Mariel than he fell in with a large convoy composed of

forty-two coasting-vessels, under the protection of two brigs of war. As soon as the convoy espied Porter they put in to the harbor of Mariel, which was defended by a small fort mounting two long guns. Porter anchored his brig outside, the water being too shallow for him to enter, and from that point brought a heavy fire to bear upon the convoying brigs, and also upon the fort, as soon as the latter opened upon him with its long guns. Even without the support of the fort the enemy's force was superior, and as it was, the odds were heavily against the Guerrero. Nevertheless it was soon apparent that her fire was telling upon the enemy, and his exertions began to slacken. In a few moments the battle would have been ended and the convoy would have been captured, but just when the captain was most sanguine of success, a shot from the fort struck the heavy cable of the Guerrero and cut it in two. The ship drifted rapidly astern and struck on a rock, where she lay for some minutes apparently hard and fast; but sail being rapidly made upon her while the guns were keeping up their fire, she cast to seaward and presently went clear, the enemy supposing that she had hauled off and given up the action.

The port anchor was now got ready for letting go, and Captain Porter stood in to renew the attack. In the meantime the Spanish brigs had repaired damages, and, together with the fort, opened a raking fire on the Guerrero as she stood in. This time Captain Porter anchored some distance farther to windward, with his topsail up. Other precautions were taken with a view to meeting a second accident to the cable. All this time the enemy were firing rapidly, most of the shots striking the spars, sails, and rigging. The action now continued about twenty minutes. The smaller Spanish brig had

struck her colors, or they had been shot away, and the fire of both was growing feeble. Both had suffered severely in their spars and hulls. Every shot from the Guerrero that missed the war-ships struck among the convoy, which were packed so close inshore of the brigs that they could not avoid the Mexican fire. Several of them were sunk and their crews sought safety on shore. Another ten minutes would have decided the battle in favor of the Mexicans, when the Guerrero's cable was again cut in two, and, the wind being fresh, the brig cast to port and once more stood out to sea. The Guerrero now got her sheet anchor ready to let go, but before standing in again it was necessary to repair damages aloft. Both the topgallantmasts and several spars had been shot away, and nearly an hour was consumed in repairs and in clearing away the wreck.

In the meanwhile the noise of the battle had made its way to Havana, and couriers had been sent to the city announcing the presence of the Guerrero, which the Spanish admiral had supposed to be still at Vera Cruz. The Lealtad, a sixty-four-gun frigate, three times the size and strength of the Guerrero, was lying in port, just refitted, and with her sails unbent. Her men were summoned on board, every available boat was put in requisition, and the Lealtad was towed out to sea. While this was going on the sails were bent, the rigging rove, and the batteries put in order. When the Lealtad was within ten miles of Mariel the breeze set in freshly, and the frigate came in sight of the Mexican brig, still at work diligently repairing damages.

As a contest with such an enemy was clearly hopeless, even to a commanding officer like Porter, who was ready to take almost any chances, the Guerrero now prepared to run for it, and getting up such sail as she could,

filled away to the northward. Her injuries aloft were so serious that it took some little time to get ready, and the *Lealtad* came up within four miles of her, but by desperate efforts and the use of such temporary expedients as only a sailor of Porter's ready resource could devise, the defects were remedied and the brig, with all sail set, began to leave the enemy behind. At sunset there was every prospect that she would make her escape.

The stubborn tenacity of Captain Porter, which he possessed in common with the rest of his family, and an audacity that was little less than sheer recklessness, now gave a new aspect to the situation. As soon as he found his ship out of reach of harm he became filled with regrets and longings for the convoy which he had been compelled to abandon at Mariel at a moment when success seemed to be within his grasp. He made up his mind that he would give his pursuer the slip and run back to complete the destruction of the convoy. His plan was to cut out the two brigs with his boats. Changing his course several times in the darkness, until he was satisfied that he was out of reach of the Spanish frigate, he headed once more southward. He had proceeded in this direction for an hour, when suddenly the *Lealtad* appeared close alongside and opened on him with her whole battery. Instantly the *Guerrero* tacked, and made sail to escape, this time with no ulterior thought of returning.

When daylight broke, however, the frigate was seen to windward running down for the Mexican. The last chance of escape was now gone, and Porter, as the *Lealtad* rapidly approached, prepared for the unequal conflict. It was the first pitched battle which the boy of fourteen, then a midshipman in the Mexican navy, was destined to witness, but in all the long list of encounters

in which in after-life he was to take an active part, there was none more desperate or more fiercely contested than this, his first ordeal of blood and fire.

As the *Lealtad* came up, the *Guerrero* was kept close-hauled, intending to cross her bow. When the great frigate was still three-quarters of a mile away, the *Guerrero* opened with her full broadside, directing her fire at the spars and sails, which suffered severely. Then she tacked quickly and poured in a second broadside. The *Lealtad* was taken by surprise, but she came to the wind with squared yards, and, opening fire, filled away on the same course with her opponent.

The two ships were now running side by side, half a mile apart, and the fight had begun in earnest. The plucky little brig, taking advantage of a shift of wind, closed with her heavy opponent, and delivered broadside after broadside within a hundred yards. Never for a moment did she give up the offensive. The young captain urged on his men, and catching his ardor, they responded nobly. For half an hour he maintained his ground, losing no advantage, and furiously pressing the assault. Incredible as it seems, in spite of the tremendous odds, the Mexicans were forcing the enemy to give way. The fire of the *Lealtad* began to slacken, and it looked to those on board the brig as if she were about to haul off.

At this point the wind, as so often happened in these engagements, fell calm below, though there was still enough breeze aloft to fill the light sails of the frigate. The *Guerrero* lay like a log upon the water, while her adversary, still able to maneuver, took a safe position out of reach of the short guns of the brig. From this point she poured in a most destructive fire upon the devoted *Guerrero*. The latter was powerless to answer.

Her sides were shot through and through. Her decks were reeking with slaughter. For another half-hour she lay at the mercy of her huge opponent, until she was a wreck below and aloft. At length, after the action had lasted for an hour and a half, Porter called together the remnant of his officers, who agreed with him that it was his duty to surrender, and the flag was hauled down. Upon this the *Lealtad* ran down toward the brig, barbarously keeping up her fire, and when close alongside discharged her whole broadside, making havoc with the Mexicans. At this last fire the brave and heroic young captain was cut in two by a shot from a twenty-four-pounder.

The frigate now lay alongside for several hours repairing damages and removing the marks of the fight. The shot-holes were covered with tin, which was painted black like the side of the ship. New sails were bent, the rigging was set up, and all other indications of the stubbornness of the conflict were removed. At the end of four hours the boats from the victorious frigate came alongside, and her people swarmed over the decks of the *Guerrero* like so many freebooters. In a short time the officers and crew were stripped of everything they had, the body of Porter was unceremoniously thrown overboard, and the next morning the two vessels proceeded in company to Havana. Here they were received with an ovation, the Spaniards apparently thinking that the victory of a sixty-four-gun frigate over a twenty-two-gun brig was a matter which should be the subject of great national congratulations and rejoicing.

Among the many battles fought first and last by the Porter family there was none more desperate in its character or more fatal in its results than this which the *Guerrero* fought against the *Lealtad*. The odds were over-

whelmingly against the brig; but for two hours she kept up a heroic resistance until her decks were like a slaughter-pen. Out of a crew of one hundred and eighty-six she lost more than eighty. Three of her officers were killed, including the captain, and all the others were more or less wounded. On her arrival at Havana the officers were transferred to a guard-ship. A parole was offered to young Porter, but with the stubborn self-devotion so characteristic of his race, the boy declined to accept it, preferring to share the captivity of his shipmates. This was the last exploit in which the Porters engaged in the Mexican navy. A few months afterward the commodore threw up his commission in disgust and returned home, whither he had been preceded by his boy midshipman, the only survivor of the members of his family whom he had taken with him to Mexico.



## CHAPTER III

### EARLY YEARS IN THE NAVY

AFTER his capture in the *Guerrero*, and subsequent release, young David Porter was sent home to Chester, to obtain the schooling which had been so rudely interrupted. Notwithstanding the unfortunate train of circumstances that had resulted in Commodore Porter's resignation from the navy, he had not lost the attachment of his old friends in public life, nor was there any disposition to forget his great services in 1812. In fact, the Adams administration, which had approved the sentence of the court-martial, had since that time had considerable cause to regret it, and in its last moments attempted to make some slight amends by appointing the commodore's son a midshipman in the United States navy—the thing which he most desired in the world. His appointment was dated January 2, 1829.

Porter at this time was sixteen years old, and therefore a little—but only a little—above the age at which midshipmen usually entered the service. But the experience through which he had passed, first in the West India cruise with his father at the age of eleven, and later for two years in the Mexican service, ending with the battle between the *Lealtad* and the *Guerrero*, had made him, even upon his first day's tour of duty, a veteran naval officer. The practical jokes of the steerage, with which the "reefers" of a few months' standing made

life a burden for the newly entered youngsters, were not for him. He knew more about handling a ship and fighting a ship than all his companions put together, and from the moment that he joined the service he was regarded with a wholesome respect, and became at once the dominating spirit among his young shipmates. This accounts in part for the marked and distinctive place which Porter held in the navy all through the thirty years of his career prior to the civil war—a period in which, except for a few months during the war with Mexico, he had no opportunity for distinction, and in which, with the same exception, he in fact performed no service that took his life out of the ordinary routine of professional duty. During this period there were events and expeditions by which the navy added to its reputation, such as Downes's campaign in Sumatra, in the Potomac, the wonderful exploring expedition of Wilkes, and the opening of the commerce of the far East by Perry's expedition to Japan; but in none of these did Porter have a part. In fact, his duties during the years of peace were of a character quite as commonplace as those of almost any officer in the service.

The accession of Jackson to the presidency in March, 1829, brought into power Commodore Porter's most intimate political friends. The President had a strong personal sympathy for an officer whose character and conduct so much resembled his own, and lost no time in repairing, as far as he could, what he deemed the injustice of his predecessor. The new Secretary of the Navy, Branch, as well as several other members of the Cabinet, were also friendly to Porter, and their friendliness took a tangible form in the appointment of the commodore to a diplomatic post on his return from Mexico in the following year.

Young Porter's first cruise, as might have been expected from the friendly influences that stood behind him, was in the Mediterranean squadron, at that time the most sought after of the naval stations abroad. He sailed from New York in August, 1829, in the *Constellation*, commanded by Captain Alexander S. Wadsworth. This was the ship in which his father had performed his first service as a midshipman on the famous cruise in the West Indies during the French War, when she was commanded by Truxtun, and captured the *Insurgente*. On her present voyage the *Constellation* took out Mr. McLane and Mr. Rives, the ministers to England and France, with their families. She arrived at Cowes in September, and in October joined the squadron at Port Mahon.

In addition to the envoys, the *Constellation* took out the recently appointed commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean station, Commodore James Biddle. Biddle was a veteran of the War of 1812, who had distinguished himself, when in command of the *Hornet* in the last year of the war, by the capture of the *Penguin*, as well as by his wonderful escape, after a long chase, from the seventy-four-gun ship *Cornwallis*. He had been a midshipman in the *Philadelphia* when she was lost on the rocks at the entrance of Tripoli in 1803, and had shared with the elder Porter the eighteen months' captivity that was the lot of all the officers in Bainbridge's unlucky ship. Unfortunately, he had been one of the members of the court-martial that had convicted the commodore in 1825, against all of whom the latter felt a deep and bitter resentment. Biddle was, however, a man of strong good sense and generous spirit, and he took a warm and friendly interest in the commodore's boy.

The captain of the *Constellation*, Wadsworth, was a

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rigid and inflexible observer of professional routine, and, as ill luck would have it, had also been a member of the Porter court-martial. Rightly or wrongly, the midshipman thought himself during the cruise the victim of the captain's arbitrary conduct, which showed itself on more than one occasion. In the summer of 1830, Commodore Porter, who had shortly before been appointed consul-general at Algiers, came out to Port Mahon in the *Boston* on his way to his post. The implacable commodore refused to have anything to do with either Biddle or Wadsworth, as was his practice with all his former judges. In fact, the year which he spent with the squadron did not help the boy's relations with his commanding officers. Biddle behaved magnanimously about it—as, indeed, he could well afford to do—and not only put the *Boston* at Porter's disposition for several months, but upon the latter's appointment to the Turkish mission in 1831, sent the *John Adams* to take him to Constantinople. He also did much to shield the commodore's son from the disciplinary activity of the captain of the *Constellation*—a service of which the boy stood, or thought he stood, in some need, and which he always gratefully remembered.

The two years' cruise of the *Constellation*, apart from the ordinary routine of ship life and the usual sightseeing and entertaining at the Mediterranean ports, was as absolutely uneventful as such a cruise could be. The first summer, that of 1830, was spent on the French and Italian coasts, principally at Barcelona, Marseilles, Genoa, Leghorn, and Naples; the second in the Greek archipelago. During both winters the ship lay at Port Mahon with the rest of the squadron, following its long period of idleness with a spring cruise to the Barbary ports. At the end of the second summer she received

orders for home, and arrived at Norfolk November 13, 1831.

On his return, Porter obtained a three months' leave of absence, and went to the family home in Chester. On the 13th of February, 1832, we find him applying to the department for a renewal of his leave, "in order that he might devote a little time to the scientific part of his profession." This was granted, and shortly before it expired, on the 30th of April, he applied for orders for sea service, expressing a wish to sail in the frigate *United States*. She was then fitting out at New York for a cruise in the Mediterranean. Commodore Daniel T. Patterson had been named as Biddle's successor, and she went out as his flag-ship. He also had been one of the Philadelphia's midshipmen at Tripoli, and in the War of 1812 had commanded the flotilla at the battle of New Orleans, a service for which he had received the thanks of Congress "for valor and good conduct." Like Biddle, he had been the devoted friend of Porter's father in the old days of Tripoli and 1812, but, unlike Biddle, he had had no connection with the Fajardo trial, and the friendship had remained unbroken. Moreover, the two officers were of the same political faith, and united by their personal loyalty to the same leader, who on his part took good care of both of them, as he always did of his friends.

Under these favoring conditions Porter, now an active and vigorous lad of nineteen, sailed from New York in the *United States*, July 3, 1832, and this cruise remained to him, during all his after-years, the happiest memory of his life. Not the least of its attractions lay in the fact that from the easy custom of the times, or the special favor of his patrons, the commodore was able to take with him his family, among them the daughter who

was to be the central figure in the boy's first and only love romance, and whose companionship and sympathy were to lighten the cares and burdens of maturer years during more than half a century of married life. The commodore was a man of unusual breadth and cultivation; and he looked upon young Porter almost as a son, and kept him always under his eye, transferring him to the Delaware when he took the ship of the line for his flag-ship, and affording him, so far as it could be afforded by a Mediterranean cruise of the period, the opportunity for professional development.

The naval profession in the twenties and thirties was a comparatively simple occupation. It made no such demands upon the mental resources of its officers as it makes to-day. The progress of science and mechanical art in their application to the equipment and operation of a modern war-ship has made the occupation of a naval officer really an aggregation of professions. An efficient navy in these later days must have upon its list a large number of officers who are specialists in some one of half a dozen branches of scientific research and who have some familiarity with all of them. The modern steel ship of war, with its triple-expansion engines driving two or even three screws; its infinity of auxiliary engines for subsidiary purposes; its electric appliances for lighting, for communication, for firing, possibly for revolving turrets and other similar objects; its steel frame and plating, always in danger of corrosion, and liable to injuries in action, requiring a floating shipyard of tools and skilled artisans to repair them; its cellular structure, its labyrinthine arrangement, its main and secondary batteries embracing an immense variety of guns, requiring the most elaborate and complicated devices for handling and using; its torpedoes, its high explosives, its coal supply

and stowage, its distilling apparatus—has become an instrument whose complexity even when used merely for cruising purposes, is nothing less than bewildering. Its proper direction and employment require the solution of problems infinitely varied and involved, and covering almost every field of mechanical science. Of course, at this time, as at all times, the fighting qualities of courage and energy and steadiness of nerve are necessary elements of professional character, and they are required no less and no more in the *Indiana* and the *New York* than they were in the *Constitution* and the *Bon Homme Richard*. These things belong to no one period alone. But the profession now demands of its officers not only the accomplishments of the soldier, the seaman, and the navigator, but the highest kind of scientific attainment, and it demands this not only in the supreme crisis of battle, but in the most ordinary routine of every-day cruising.

Of all the naval service between 1830 and 1840 knew nothing. Porter was essentially a progressive officer, and quite beyond his fellows to master and make use of new applications of science to the material of his profession. His career in the Mississippi squadron shows that no man was more free from the shackles of conventionality and routine, both in the appliances which he used and in the way in which he used them. But neither Porter nor any one else could in 1835 have foreseen the material development of the next forty years any more than one could have foreseen the general development of mechanical science. His life in the Mediterranean squadron was the life of his fellows, and the growth which he attained in this period was the best that his surroundings afforded.

The ship of war of the time was, in point of fact, the ship of 1812, the ship of Nelson and Jervis, and for that



matter the ship of Rodney and Boscawen. For nearly a hundred years there had been no change worth remarking in its structure, its motive power, its rig, its interior arrangement. The battery, as well as the ship, had undergone little development, for even then shell guns had not come into general use, and the piece was still fired by a match at the vent. To make the observations and calculations required in navigation, to handle the ship under sail, to fire a gun so as to hit a mark, to keep in good condition the ship, the rigging, and the sails, and to manage the crew, made up the whole round of a naval officer's duties. Apart from navigation and the actual working of the ship, they might be summed up in the combined duties of the four warrant officers—the boatswain, the gunner, the carpenter, and the sailmaker. Of course, even in these simple matters one may attain extraordinary proficiency. There were captains who handled a line-of-battle ship like a yacht; there were others who could escape from a chase under circumstances the most desperate, as did Hull in the *Constitution*; and when it came to gunnery, our officers as a body were well in advance of all their competitors. We had shown our superiority in 1812 over the English, just as they had shown theirs over other navies on scores of occasions, and above all at Trafalgar; but, as to mental equipment, there was next to nothing required, at least in comparison with the requirements of the present day.

The life on the European station in 1830 was essentially a life of parade. The great ships of the line and frigates, which basked in the winter sunshine of Port Mahon or cruised in leisurely fashion from Gibraltar to Algiers, from Tripoli to Malta, from Leghorn to Toulon and Barcelona, and occasionally to the Levant, were sent to the station as the visible and tangible expression of

the dignity of the young republic. The commodore was an august and impressive personage, surrounded by a conventional grandeur, who represented his government to the naval powers of the Old World in a manner befitting so distinguished a functionary. The officers of the squadron were largely occupied in the exchange of international courtesies, in the reception of royalties, in balls and entertainments, and in affording in general the accessory ornament to the splendor of the commander-in-chief.

In all this side of naval life Porter took a lively part. Easy in manner, light-hearted and companionable by natural temperament, as ready as any one for a lark, he went into the fun and frolic of it all with the same zest that he gave to his serious pursuits. It was well for him that he had the experience and that he made the most of it. The two years before his appointment had been spent in the Mexican navy, where his occupations had been cruising in the Gulf and fighting the Spaniards, running the blockade of Key West and raiding the coast of Cuba, and where his fellow officers amused themselves chiefly with playing *monte* and smoking in their shirt-sleeves on the quarter-deck—matters which, as Porter gravely says in one of his books, “of course would not be tolerated in a properly regulated vessel of war.” It was fortunate for him that while he was still at an impressionable age he should have had precisely the sort of corrective which such an experience required. His four years on the European station opened to him a new world, and it is chiefly to the social and ceremonious side of his Mediterranean cruises, aided by the courteous and gentleman-like instincts which he acquired by birth and early training, that the rare union of simplicity and distinction which marked his manner in later life was due.

Nor were the strictly professional lessons which this cruise afforded lost upon him. A ship in which he was thrown with twenty or thirty other midshipmen, and which carried a crew of eight hundred men, was a little world in itself, where he had to learn his place and his duties. Keen and observing, ready of resource, full of alertness and dash, he soon became a marked man both with his seniors and his boyish companions. There was no occasion to put to use the fighting lessons which as a child he had learned in the *Esmeralda* and the *Guerro*; but the lessons had been well learned, and when the hour came the man would be ready. The training he was now getting was precisely what was needed to give him breadth of view, and to foster, in all that pertained to the discipline of his profession, a harmonious development of mind and character.

It is really worth while to give so much attention to these phases of Porter's early training, because they explain much in his later growth. It is possible, even probable, that he would have been quite a different man had the order of his early experiences been inverted, and the Mexican episode followed instead of preceding his first cruises in the navy. But what he would have gained in symmetry and finish he would beyond question have lost in dash and initiative and freedom from conventional routine. There was about him all his life a certain quality—you may call it original, you may call it lawless, you may call it dare-devil—but, whatever its name, it was a quality that went far to make the strong personality of the future admiral, and it had its direct origin in the boy's Mexican career.

In the summer of 1833 the squadron, composed of the *United States* and *Constellation*, made a cruise to the East, touching at Naples, Palermo, Trieste, Athens,

Constantinople, and Smyrna. In that delightful but now forgotten book of Willis, called *Pencilings by the Way*, we have a charming account of this cruise. Willis was the guest of the wardroom officers, and, joining the ship at Leghorn, remained with her until she left Smyrna. His narrative of the cruise, told with his characteristic grace and charm of expression, gives a better idea than can be found anywhere else of the life at this period on board the flag-ship of the Mediterranean squadron. He is never tired of praising the ships, the officers, and the order and regularity of the world around him. The voyage, from his point of view—and it is clearly a correct one—seems to be one perpetual *festa* from beginning to end. He says: “I have a private pride of my own in showing the frigate as an American to many of my foreign friends. One’s nationality becomes nervously sensitive abroad, and in the beauty and order of the ships, the manly elegance of the officers, and the general air of superiority and decision throughout, I have found food for some of the highest feelings of gratification of which I am capable.”

On leaving the ship at Smyrna, Willis says: “From the comparisons I have made between our own ships and the ships of war of other nations, I think we may well be proud of our navy. I had learned in Europe, long before joining the United States, that the respect we exact from foreigners is paid more to America afloat than to a continent they think as far off at least as the moon. They see our men-of-war, and they know very well what they have done and, from the appearance and character of our officers, what they might do again—and there is a tangibility in the deductions from knowledge and eyesight which beats books and statistics. I have heard Englishmen deny one by one every claim we have to political and

moral superiority; but I have found no one illiberal enough to refuse a compliment—and a handsome one—to Yankee ships.”

No doubt Willis saw the prettiest side of it all, and if, instead of a summer in the wardroom cruising to the naval ports of the powers, he had spent a winter in the steerage at Port Mahon, he would have drawn a somewhat different picture. Those idle winters were more or less responsible for their share of moral shipwrecks of promising young fellows, hopelessly broken down at the outset of their career. But to those who had the toughness of fiber to stand the strain—and they were by far the largest part—the early cruises in the old liners and frigates carried with them a powerful influence for good in developing all that was manly and alert and self-reliant, in teaching the lesson of discipline and order, and in arousing that strong *esprit du corps* which is one of the greatest safeguards of the service, as it is certainly one of its greatest charms.

The United States arrived at New York December 11, 1834, and Porter again found himself in the old familiar surroundings at Chester. His examination for promotion was now approaching, and he felt the want of better opportunities for preparation. At this time little was done for the ordinary education of junior officers. Although many attempts had been made in Congress to supply the want, and the navy was earnestly striving in the same direction, it was not until ten years later that Mr. Bancroft, then Secretary of the Navy, borrowed Fort Severn, at Annapolis, from the War Department, and by a stroke of the pen, as a purely ministerial act, created the Naval Academy.

Prior to 1845 the junior officers had desultory teaching from chaplains and schoolmasters, partly on board

cruising ships and partly at shore stations. In 1835 there were three naval schools, so called, on shore—at Boston, New York, and Norfolk. Each of them had an instructor in mathematics, with occasionally a master in French and Spanish. To one of these, that at Norfolk, Porter was now ordered, after two months' leave at home, at his own request. His application was dated February 10, 1835, and spoke of his wish to prepare for examination. On the 8th of March he reported that he had taken up his residence at Norfolk, and was attending the Naval School. The examination was held at Baltimore in April, and Porter, having passed successfully, was appointed a passed midshipman, July 3, 1835.

Porter was now attached for six months to the receiving-ship *Sea Gull*, at the Philadelphia yard. This was followed by four months' leave, at the end of which, in April, 1836, he was ordered to duty in the Coast Survey—another sort of school, but one which also gave its share of important professional training, and of which Porter reaped the full benefit in his later life. He remained on this service, with occasional intervals, for six years, until April, 1842, being most of the time engaged in making hydrographic surveys on the Atlantic coast and its harbors under the supervision of Lieutenant Gedney, who had made hydrography his principal work.

It was during this term of service in the Coast Survey that Porter was married, on the 10th of March, 1839, to George Ann Patterson, the youngest daughter of his late commander-in-chief. The marriage took place at the commandant's house, at the Washington navy-yard, of which Patterson was then in command. Commodore Porter had come home on leave of absence from his post at Constantinople, which just a week before had been raised from the rank of *chargé d'affaires* to that of min-



ister. So the two comrades who had passed their months of captivity together in the pasha's prison at Tripoli found themselves again side by side at the marriage of their children. It would be hard to find a prettier little domestic drama than this, colored as it was with a tinge of naval romance, cast upon it from the early years of the century by the presence of the two Tripoli veterans; one of them giving his daughter in marriage to the other's son, and both transmitting a family tradition of brilliant achievement to which the young bridegroom was one day to add a new and more splendid page.

If we would speak of any marriage as "suitable," surely this was such a marriage, not only in its origin, but in its influence on Porter's life. For more than fifty years this happy union filled the life of both husband and wife with unbroken love and sympathy. To the last the admiral found his strongest support in the devotion and constancy and tender attachment upon which he had leaned for half a century, and never leaned in vain.

On the 27th of February, 1841, Porter was commissioned a lieutenant, in which grade he remained for more than twenty years. The next year he was ordered to the Congress, and sailed in her to the Mediterranean. The Tripoli officers were now rapidly passing away. Commodore Patterson died shortly before Porter sailed, and Commodore Porter while the cruise was in progress. Stewart, Morris, and Biddle were almost the only survivors of the great captains of the earlier wars. To Porter the successive deaths of his father's companions in arms came with a sense of personal loss, for they had been his friends as well, though he no longer needed their friendly influence in his career. He had established his place in the service, and he was known both to those above him and below him as endowed with the



qualities that constitute a leader of men. He was one who would not be overlooked when an officer of such qualities was needed for serious work.

The Congress arrived at Gibraltar in August, 1842, and Commodore Morgan's flag-ship, the *Columbus*, came out a month later and joined the squadron at Port Mahon, where it was to winter as usual. The murder on shore of one of the officers of the Congress, Sailing-Master Patterson, determined the commodore to seek other quarters, and the squadron sailed for Genoa, where it passed the winter. In the following year the Congress was transferred to the Brazil station, where she remained for several months.

Returning home in 1845, Porter passed a year on duty at the newly established Naval Observatory. About this time the State Department found occasion to inform itself as to the internal condition of Santo Domingo, and Porter was selected to do the work and to obtain accurate information respecting the people belonging to the new Republic of Dominica. Instructions were accordingly sent, March 11, 1846, to Commander Samuel Mercer, commanding the brig *Lawrence*, then at Pensacola, to "acquire and transmit to this department, as soon as possible, exact and full information concerning the condition—political, social, and commercial—of the new Dominican Republic.

"The collection of this information will manifestly demand a thorough overland exploration. . . . With this in view, Lieutenant D. D. Porter has been detailed, and will report to you for this special service. He has already been made acquainted with the views of the department, and you will give him for his guidance a copy of these instructions." Porter's instructions were chiefly verbal, but the department, in ordering him, in a letter of March

12th, to proceed to Pensacola for passage in the *Lawrence* to Santo Domingo, said: "The duty upon which you are detailed demands every energy and sound judgment for its performance, and the department has confidence that you will perform it well."

Porter, on his arrival, found that the *Lawrence* had left Pensacola a few days before, but that the *Porpoise*, under Lieutenant Hunt, was expected shortly, and concluded that she would serve the department's purpose as well. She was therefore substituted, and arrived with Porter at Santo Domingo City after a passage of twenty-five days. He was cordially received by Santana, the President of Dominica, and officers and guides were detailed to accompany him. On the 19th he set out on horseback on his journey of exploration. His plan was to visit Azua, one of the frontier towns, thence to travel through the most thickly populated portion of the country, stopping at most of the large interior towns, and to meet the *Porpoise* at Puerto Plata. His observations were set down at length in a journal, but he occasionally found time for a brief despatch to the department.

On June 5th he writes from Santiago, where he had arrived the day before, "after a most exciting and fatiguing journey across the mountains. Have traveled since I left St. Domingo six hundred and fifty miles, have had an opportunity of seeing all the south side, crossed over that part of the mountains inhabited, and I am now employing every moment to fulfil my instructions upon the north side." Later he writes: "The dangers of traveling over these mountains, forty-five hundred feet above sea-level, were very great, and some idea can be formed of the difficulties with which I had to contend when I mention that I crossed one river fifty-six times, and another thirty-one, in a day, often having to swim over, at

the risk of losing horse and rider ; but I succeeded in accomplishing the journey without any serious accident, though I had two horses so severely injured by falling over precipices that I had to leave them on the road."

He continues: " By the time I reach Port Platte I shall have traveled seven hundred and ninety miles through the inhabited part of the island. I have been through four of the largest provinces, over twelve counties, stopped at twenty towns and villages, visited every little settlement that I have heard of, and crossed most of their principal rivers. I have been domesticated with people of every class, from the opulent farmer (with a house no better than a cow-pen) to the lowest order of society who live in huts surrounded with misery and disease, and whose habitations in any other country would not be thought fit to put an animal in." On the 19th of June, 1846, having completed his explorations and observations, greatly to the satisfaction of the department, Porter sailed from Puerto Plata in the Porpoise, and arrived at Pensacola on the 28th. Returning to Washington, he found that war had been declared with Mexico, and immediately applied for active service.

It was not until the 30th of November that Porter's application received a favorable answer. In the meantime, he returned to his duties at the Observatory, which had begun in May of the previous year and which had suffered a four months' interruption during his tour of exploration. The Observatory, which had been established only a short time before, had been united with the Depot of Charts under the Navy Department, afterward well known as the Hydrographic Office, and Porter's work here was in some sense a continuation of his six years' service in the Coast Survey. His occupations during these periods of scientific employment were a posi-

tive and important factor in his intellectual development. His schooling had been of a desultory and fitful character, and his studies at the Columbian College in Washington were interrupted by his exile in Mexico with his father. After his appointment in the navy his only instructor was the ship's schoolmaster, whose endeavor it was, in those days, under unfavorable circumstances and with indifferent success, to instil into the midshipmen of the ship some knowledge of the rudiments of navigation. The seven years passed in scientific study and observation in the Coast Survey and in the Hydrographic Office helped greatly to supply the defects in his early training and to afford the mental discipline of which, up to this time, he had been largely deprived. The work also gave him an expert knowledge of the charting of coasts and channels, the observation of marine and meteorological phenomena, the science of winds, tides, and currents, and a local pilot's familiarity with the coasts and seaports of his own country, all of which was of great help in his later career. But perhaps the greatest advantage of all lay in the personal contact and intercourse which Porter was thus enabled to have with two of the foremost men of science of that day, Hassler and Maury, and their assistants and pupils.

The Coast Survey was really Hassler's creation, and under his direction was beginning, in 1833, to enter upon the great field of usefulness which it has ever since so creditably occupied. Hassler, a Swiss refugee, who had found a patron in his countryman, Secretary Gallatin, had brought to the work a fresh and vigorous mind, stored with the latest and most advanced results of European investigation. Although appointed superintendent in 1817, he received little support or encouragement until the Jackson administration, and his work was virtually

accomplished during the ten years between 1833 and his death. Porter joined the Survey at the very time when Hassler was putting in operation the plan and methods that laid the foundation of the greatest scientific work ever carried on by our Government. During this period the great base line on Long Island was determined, and the survey of the coast was first extended from New York eastward to Point Judith, and southward to Cape Henry.

Hassler saw that in young naval officers of ability he would find the best possible assistants for his work, and that their employment would benefit both themselves and the Survey. His great accomplishments, united with an attractive personality and magnetic enthusiasm, induced a large number of them to take up the work during these years. Among them were Dahlgren, Rodgers, Sands, Porter, Rowan, Gedney, and many others. They were entrusted by Hassler with both hydrographic and topographic duties, and the charts of this part of the coast are still the best evidence of the fidelity and accuracy of their labors. Lieutenant Gedney, under whom Porter served for several summers, had charge of the parties about New York, and it was while surveying the bar in the summer of 1835 that the discovery was made of Gedney's channel, which, by affording access for the first time to large vessels, gave a new impulse to the maritime and commercial development of New York. The officers attached to the Survey spent the summer in field-work or in hydrographic surveying, and the winter at the Coast Survey Office in Washington, in the preparation of the charts that were the results of the summer's labor.

Hassler was succeeded as superintendent by Alexander Dallas Bache, a connection of Porter's by marriage, and during his able administration Porter was again em-

ployed in the Survey for a year and a half in 1848 and 1849. The attractiveness of the life and the interest and enthusiasm which the work of the Survey aroused, made it a favorite duty with officers of scientific tastes, while no one could feel that from the standpoint of professional development the time spent in it was lost. The late Admiral Sands, who gives in his *Memoirs* a pleasant description of the camp-life of the field parties, in which officers were able to have their families with them, speaks of himself as "enamored" of the work; and Porter's brother-in-law, the accomplished Carlile Patterson, left the navy and adopted the Coast Survey as a profession, finally becoming the successor of Hassler and Bache in the office of superintendent.

It was during one of these alternations of field and office work, when Porter was on duty in Washington, in 1840, in the year after his marriage, that he had the encounter, nearly resulting in a fatal termination, with Rowan, also a passed midshipman at the time, and afterward the successor of Porter as Vice-Admiral of the Navy. It was a boyish dispute about nothing, while the two were working with their comrades in one of the rooms at the Coast Survey Office—some trifling thing which Porter did that annoyed and irritated the other, and after a hot exchange of words they came to blows. While Porter was not a man of violent temper, he was as quick as any one to resent what he thought an insult, and both he and Rowan at such a time were perfectly fearless of consequences. Duels were still common enough both in and out of the service, and Porter immediately challenged Rowan, and asked Sands, another officer who had witnessed the dispute, to act as his second. Fortunately the seconds had cool heads, and were devoted friends of both the principals; so they

set themselves to work to compose the difficulty, and the duel never took place. It was well that they accomplished the result, as with Rowan and Porter it would have been a fight to a finish, and the navy could ill have afforded to lose either its future admiral or vice-admiral.

When Porter was ordered to the Naval Observatory on May 21, 1845, he was fortunate in finding at its head a man of scientific enthusiasms quite equal to those of his former chief, Hassler, and one who was Hassler's superior in original investigation. This was Matthew Fontaine Maury, easily the foremost student of science that the line of the navy has ever produced. He had been appointed Superintendent of the Depot of Charts, afterward known as the Hydrographic Office, in 1842, while still a lieutenant, and he immediately entered upon the investigations that resulted in the publication, a few years later, of the Wind and Current Charts, and the great work on the Physical Geography of the Sea, which gave him a world-wide reputation, and led Humboldt to describe him as the founder of a new science. In 1844 the National Observatory was united with the Depot of Charts, and it was here that Porter, working under Maury's supervision, passed more than a year after his second European cruise. It was doubtless at Maury's suggestion that Porter was selected for the exploration of Santo Domingo, an arduous work calling for a high degree of intelligence, as well as physical endurance; and upon its completion, Maury was glad to take him back, until the Government could find a place for him in the squadron then actively engaged upon the coast of Mexico.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE WAR WITH MEXICO

FOR several years the course of events on the southwestern frontier had pointed to hostilities with Mexico. Texas had won her independence after a bloody struggle, and had sought and accomplished her annexation to the United States. In July, 1845, the commander-in-chief of the Gulf squadron was instructed by the Secretary of the Navy that he was thereafter to consider Texas as a part of the country, to be protected like any other territory of the Union. Its southern boundary was in dispute with Mexico, and this dispute resulted in the collision which brought about the declaration of war on the 12th of May, 1846.

The military campaign, as at first planned, contemplated the invasion of Mexico from the Rio Grande by the army under General Taylor. In spite of the victories at Monterey and Buena Vista, the difficulties of the long march through the heart of the country were so great that the advance on this line was abandoned, and the movement which finally decided the war started from Vera Cruz as a base and proceeded under the direction of General Scott, through a comparatively limited field of operations, to the City of Mexico. On the west coast the naval campaign under Stockton accomplished results of overwhelming importance, in the conquest and occupation of California and the ultimate annexation of

a vast territory ; but these results, like those of Dewey's campaign at Manila, were due, not so much to preconceived design as to the quickness and enterprise of the naval commander. It was to the operations on the east coast that the efforts of the naval administration were chiefly directed. The object of these operations was first to blockade, and afterward to seize and occupy, the principal ports on the Gulf, which, in their order of position from north to south, comprised Tampico, Tuspan, Vera Cruz, Alvarado, and Frontera, the last the seaport of the large interior town of Tabasco. Of these, Vera Cruz was by far the most important. When the plan of the military campaign was changed from Taylor's advance from the Rio Grande to Scott's advance through the valley of Mexico, it became the duty of the navy—and it was the most considerable naval operation on the east coast during the war—to cover the landing of the troops and to assist in the reduction of Vera Cruz.

At the outbreak of the war, the squadron in the Gulf, known as the Home squadron, was under the command of Commodore David Conner, a typical officer of the period—not one of the officers who had been trained at Tripoli and had commanded in the War of 1812, but one of the type which had grown up during the thirty years of peace following the war with England. He was an adept in handling a sailing frigate, and a short time before had carried his flag-ship, the *Potomac*, into the harbor of Havana during a norther, suddenly taking the deck from the captain, who had become confused by the difficulties of the situation. In landing the army at Vera Cruz, Conner did the work with a precision, an exactness, and a minute perfection of prearranged detail that could not be excelled. But he was wholly wanting in the energy and initiative necessary for a war command.

Captain William Parker, who knew him well and served for some time as his aide, says of him: "He was an educated man and a brave officer, but during the war he always seemed to be too much afraid of risking his men. He lacked moral courage, and would not take the responsibility his position imposed upon him. Consequently he failed."

It seems incredible that an officer of whom this could be said by so competent a judge as Parker, should have been allowed to retain the command of the squadron which, as was then supposed, was to conduct the principal naval campaign of the war. It was another instance, to be noticed more or less in every war of the United States, of that fatal indulgence which leads the naval administration to keep in his position a flag-officer whom the outbreak of the war finds in command until he has proved his unfitness. It is an elementary proposition that in war the first blow should be the hardest and the quickest of which the resources of a belligerent are capable. The object of war is to coerce the enemy into a concession to which the party aggrieved thinks himself entitled, and which he can not secure by other means. When he has once decided to strike, the harder and quicker he strikes, the surer he is to accomplish his end. He gives no time for preparation, and a telling blow at the outset creates a demoralization incalculably greater than after months of delay. There is no surer way to spin out a war indefinitely, and to imperil the chances of ultimate success, than to follow up a declaration with weeks of inaction. It is at the beginning of a war above all that a nation should put forth its tremendous efforts and have in the field its ablest and most vigorous commanders. Such a policy, accompanied by proper preparation in the department—and a Secretary of the Navy whom a war

hereafter finds unprepared should be impeached, if not indicted for treason—is sure to bring about the desired result, which is, that the beginning of war shall be also the beginning of peace.

Conner had been in command of the Home squadron for several years, and the Navy Department accordingly left him there when the war broke out, and for nine months after. This, as it turned out, was a fatal mistake. The obvious point of attack for a naval force in the Gulf was Vera Cruz. It was the only harbor worthy of the name on the east coast; it was the commercial metropolis of Mexico, and it was but one hundred and fifty miles from the capital. It was fortified by a wall, with bastions at the angles, and by the Castle of San Juan d'Ulloa, rising from a coral reef directly in front of the city, and separated from it by a passage about eight hundred yards in width. The reef stretched out half a mile or more seaward, to the east of the castle, preventing the close approach of ships on that side. The castle was long supposed to be the strongest position on the continent, and impregnable to an attack by sea; but during the hostilities between the French and Mexicans in 1838 it had been captured by Admiral Baudin after a five hours' bombardment. Baudin was a very capable officer, and his attacking squadron consisted of only three frigates, two bomb-vessels and one or two sloops of war, with a couple of small steamers to tow the frigates into position. The walls of the castle were of soft coral, and the shells from the new shell-guns of the French told upon it severely. This attack was only eight years before our war with Mexico.

On the 13th of May, 1846, the day after war was declared, Commodore Conner wrote from Brazos to the department announcing his intention of distributing his

vessels for the blockade of the coast, and adding: "I am of opinion that, in its present state of preparation, it would not be advisable, with my present force, to attack the Castle of San Juan d'Ulloa." The idea that it would not do to attack the castle "in its present state of preparation" is rather remarkable, as it could hardly be expected that the "state of preparation" was to grow less efficient with time. As to Conner's force, the squadron at this date included the side-wheel steamer Mississippi (carrying eight 8-inch and two 10-inch guns), the screw steamer Princeton, the 44-gun frigates Cumberland, Potomac, and Raritan, the sailing sloops John Adams, Falmouth, and St. Mary's, and the brigs Somers, Porpoise, and Lawrence, a force much superior to that of Baudin. It was reenforced during the summer by other ships, including several small and efficient steamers. Yet nothing was done looking to the capture of Vera Cruz either by the administration or the commander-in-chief.

There were at this time in the navy two officers who really knew something of the castle and its defenses from their own personal observation and experience. Both of them had applied promptly for active service, but without success; and at about the same time each evolved a detailed plan for the attack of the castle which he sent to the Navy Department, and offered to carry out himself.

Of all the romantic stories that fill our naval history there is none more romantic than that which brings together the two names of Farragut and Porter. The peculiar relation of young Farragut to the Porter family, and the more than fatherly care with which his boyish training had been directed by the old commodore in the Essex, found a fitting, and by no means accidental, sequel

in the close association between Farragut, the flag-officer, and the commodore's son in the campaign of New Orleans. It is not a little singular that at this stage in their career, during the only war that broke the long period of monotony in their professional service down to the Civil War, both should have been considering, at the very same moment but quite independently and from a widely different standpoint, the naval problem of the hour; that each was moved to propose his own solution of it to the Government; and each volunteered to carry out his adopted plan. Farragut was at this time many numbers above Porter on the navy list, having received his commission as commander in 1841, the same year in which Porter was made a lieutenant. The difference is perhaps better shown by the fact that Porter only reached in 1861 the rank which Farragut had attained in 1841. Farragut was therefore twenty years in advance of Porter in rank, while he was twelve years his senior in age.

As early as 1822 Farragut had been at Vera Cruz in a sloop of war at the time when the Mexican revolution had succeeded in driving the Spaniards from the territory, except at their last stronghold of San Juan. Again in 1838 it was his good fortune, when in command of the *Erie*, to witness the attack of the French squadron under Baudin, which reduced the city and castle. Here he had an opportunity to study minutely and under the most favorable circumstances the capacity of the fortress for defense, and the methods adopted by an officer of unusual skill and resource in conducting the attack. The action was also of signal importance as marking a turning-point in the development of naval warfare, by the introduction of two of the principal features that have characterized the modern revolution in

methods of sea-fighting—the use of steamers, and of horizontal shell-fire as distinguished from vertical shell-fire from mortars. All this Farragut turned to the best account, and it was in view of this experience that he expressed to the department his confidence that the fortress could be taken either by direct bombardment or by escalade, and proposed to undertake the enterprise with the sailing ship of the line *Pennsylvania* and two sloops of war. Nothing came of his proposal, and when he finally attained a command (the sloop *Saratoga*), and joined the squadron, the town and fortress had surrendered to an attack which, to his great chagrin, had been almost wholly conducted by the army. The cruise in the *Saratoga* turned out unfortunately. The captain and most of the crew were down with yellow fever. Farragut was dissatisfied with the duties assigned him, and engaged in a controversy with the commander-in-chief, which he carried later on to the department—all to no good purpose, and with the only result of bringing himself into official disfavor.

Porter also knew something of the defensive qualities of the fortress of San Juan, though his experience was in no way comparable to that of Farragut. With the interior arrangement of the castle he was intimately acquainted, having lived there when a boy of fourteen with his father, the commodore, who had commanded the castle during his service in Mexico, and had made it his headquarters while at Vera Cruz. The boy, as might be expected, had explored every bastion and casemate and chamber and passage in the old fortress, and he proposed now to make use of his knowledge. He had never seen it in action, however, and the plan which he offered to the Navy Department shows, as does the very different plan of Farragut, a point of view corre-



sponding with his own experience and observation of the castle itself and of its defenders. Still more, it shows the peculiar characteristics of Porter's mind in dealing with problems of naval war—the daring and novelty of conception, the reliance upon boldness, suddenness, and rapidity of execution, the deliberate use of surprise as reducing by so much the efficiency of defense, the deliberate reliance upon the individual resource of the assailant, and his capacity to meet difficulties as they arise, as increasing by so much the efficiency of attack. A plan like that of Porter's must have a Porter to execute it. It was conceived by a mind essentially original, lawless, dare-devil; it would inevitably fail of execution at the hands of one who was not equally possessed of these qualities. It was a project of the same sort as those in which Cushing delighted in the later war, and which in the hands of anybody but the designer would have been lamentable failures. The scheme was so distinctly characteristic of its author that it is worth reproducing at length, as it exists in the archives of the department, from the obscurity of which it now emerges for the first time.

WASHINGTON CITY, *September 19, 1846.*

The cheapest plan of attacking the Castle of San Juan de Ulloa is to blow it up, and after due consideration the following plan is recommended. The accompanying sketch is a view of the main part of the castle fronting the town and eight hundred yards distant. The door represented leads into the middle of the castle and through an archway that comes out at a pair of steps leading to the top of the main part of the castle. There are only two of these stairways, which, when taken possession of, could be held by twenty men against any number. The black objects are barrels of gunpowder placed under the bastions, in the center, and at the door leading into the castle; these are

fired by means of wires. The effect of these cases of gunpowder will be to throw down the bastions and burst in the door, and the middle section, if it will not be thrown *down* will be so rent and shaken that it will paralyze those within, and create a panic. Fifty well-trained men will be able to gain the top of the castle and hold it while any number of boats are pulling to support them, the men making their way into the castle through the above-mentioned passage, and once in possession of the main part of the castle, the water batteries will all be commanded.

The success of this plan is predicted on experiment made by scientific men, the quantity of gunpowder proposed (one hundred pounds to each case) being greater than the quantity necessary to throw up a greater mass of stone. The fort is soft coral, easily cut with a common knife, and Captain Taylor, the submarine engineer, could work under water and insert the cases in the wall in less than two hours, and without any chance of being detected.

If the department should be of opinion that the above plan deserves any consideration, the undersigned offers himself to help Captain Taylor to carry out the enterprise, being perfectly acquainted with the intricacies of the castle, and sufficiently acquainted with the character of the garrison to be certain of success. The enterprise, though a dangerous one, would be more easy of accomplishment from the fact that an attack from such a quarter, and in such a manner, would be totally unexpected. The undersigned is willing, and would consider himself fortunate in being allowed to risk the consequences of such an undertaking, confident of success; and if not successful, he could have the satisfaction of attempting a prevention of the loss of life which would perhaps occur in a bombardment with a *small* force of ships.

The expense attending such an enterprise would be nothing compared with the desired results.

Very respectfully submitted,

DAVID D. PORTER,

*Lt. U. S. Navy.*

It is quite possible that a critic may pick flaws in Porter's plan, and the average officer would doubtless find that of Farragut, which was substantially a reproduction of the French admiral's operation, more nearly in accordance with the recognized methods of naval warfare of the period. But in cases of this kind, recognized methods go for very little; the essential thing about such plans is that they adopt unrecognized methods. They leave so much to the individual resource of the commander that they are hardly more than an outline, and they are generally modified in execution to meet unexpected conditions. They can not be judged by the fixed canons of theoretical strategy, and their success or failure depends altogether upon the man who executes them. Porter's plan is interesting, not so much as a study in naval strategy as in its indication of the nerve and audacity of the man who conceived it and who was ready to carry it out.

As Commodore Conner did not regard his force as being sufficient for the attack of the fortress "in its present state of preparation," Porter's plan, like that of Farragut, found an obscure resting-place in the pigeonholes of the Navy Department. For over five months the large and well-equipped squadron under Conner's command did nothing but maintain the blockade. Finally, the department associated with Connor one of its ablest officers, Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry. Perry was placed in the squadron with a view to his ultimately relieving Conner, and in the meantime to carry on those active operations against the enemy which Conner lacked the resolution or persistence to direct with success.

When the war broke out, Porter, as we have already seen, was engaged in the exploration of Santo Domingo, and on his return in July, 1846, had applied for active

service. His experience in the Mexican navy as a boy would have made his services peculiarly valuable, but this fact was forgotten or ignored by the naval administration, and after several months of waiting, he was finally ordered to take charge of the recruiting office at New Orleans. A service less calculated to utilize his peculiar talents could hardly have been chosen. Upon such work as this Porter was absolutely thrown away. He did it with his accustomed zeal and thoroughness, but any one else could have done it as well or nearly as well, and meantime his services on the enemy's coast, where they would have been of real use, were lost to the Government.

Porter chafed bitterly at his enforced detention at New Orleans in the routine duties of the recruiting office, while the squadron was operating against the enemy upon his old familiar fighting ground. While others were doing the fighting, he was compelled to sit in his office and wait the pleasure of the department. He was burning with eagerness to get once more into action. It was twenty years since he had had, as a child, his first taste of battle, and in the meantime he had entered upon a vigorous manhood, with a ripened judgment, a far greater familiarity with his profession, his faculty of observation acutely sharpened, and his natural qualities of courage, tenacity, and resolution unimpaired. He was now thirty-three years old, a little below middle height, yet from his compact and erect figure, his well-poised head and his commanding eye, conveying the impression of greater size. He had preeminently a sound mind in a sound body. Under the influence of a temperate life, an active habit of movement, and an inexhaustible store of animal spirits, his physical powers were far beyond those of most men. His muscular strength was enor-

mous. Although a spare man and with no great breadth at the shoulder, he was prodigiously deep-chested, and he seemed to be made wholly of muscle and sinew. Not many men of his size, or above his size, for that matter, could match him hand to hand. As an all-round boxer he was an expert, and, like his father before him, was ready enough with the use of his fists when occasion required, as sometimes happened in handling the "Jackies" of that early period. In physical endurance few men were his equal either at this time or long afterward, as was abundantly shown during the Civil War, when he seemed to be able to outlast everybody in his fleet.

In temperament Porter was restless, eager, energetic. He had the mental make-up of a born fighter, of an officer who finds his true opportunity only in war and in struggle, who before and during the contest has but one idea—to whip the enemy—and who bends all his ingenuity and resource, all his mental and physical force, to that end, without too much regard to the risk of consequences, either to himself, his ship, or his men. He was not only alert and daring in battle, but he had the temperament which makes the battle everything for the moment, and which seems to develop instantly within the man who has it, all the qualities of mind and heart that the battle demands.

After fretting for three months at the rendezvous at New Orleans, Porter at length sailed for Vera Cruz with a draft of three hundred men. He reported February 27, 1847, and immediately after his arrival was assigned to duty as first lieutenant of the steamer Spitfire, then under the command of Commander Josiah Tattnall.

The use of steam in America as a motive power for vessels dated back to the early years of the century, when Fulton made his experiment with the Clermont on the

Hudson River. The navy, as well as the merchant marine, had been slow in adopting it, and although an experimental war steamer—the first in the navy—named, after her builder, the *Fulton*, had made her trial trip under Commodore Porter in 1815, little had been done since. The first steamers that were really important additions to the naval fleet were the large side-wheelers *Missouri* and *Mississippi*, built under the Act of 1839, the first of which was burned at Gibraltar in 1843, while the second performed as constant and as useful service as any other vessel of her time in the navy, being finally destroyed in action at Port Hudson in 1863. During the Mexican War the *Mississippi* was Commodore Perry's flag-ship. A few other steamers were built during the early forties—foremost among them the efficient but unlucky *Princeton*.

At the outbreak of the war the want was felt of small steamers of sufficiently light draft to operate on the Mexican rivers, and under the Act of March 30, 1846, the *Spitfire*, *Scorpion*, *Scourge*, and *Vixen* were bought and added to the navy. These were all side-wheel steamers of from two hundred to three hundred tons and about seven feet draft, mounting two or three guns—one heavy pivot gun and two 32-pounders—and carrying fifty or sixty men. They were indispensable for operations against the ports on the Mexican rivers, with their bars outside and shoal water within. To cooperate with these there were four bomb-vessels, the brigs *Etna*, *Stromboli*, *Vesuvius*, and *Hecla*, and several small schooners, of which the *Bonita* and *Reefer* were types. These little vessels, with one or two converted prizes, such as the *Petrita*, and a few revenue-cutters, comprised what was known as the Mosquito Division, and their services were quite as important as those of all the other vessels in the



squadron. It was to this force that Porter found himself attached as executive officer of the Spitfire.

In Tattnall he found a sympathetic leader, possessing in a considerable degree the qualities that were so characteristic of the junior. He was a much older man than Porter and the senior officer of the flotilla. He would probably have obtained distinction upon a larger field of action. He was the officer who, ten years later, when in command of the China station at the disastrous attack on the Pei-ho forts, gallantly succored the British squadron under Admiral Hope, with the famous remark that "blood is thicker than water." During the Civil War, being a Georgian, he cast his lot on the Southern side, where he had little opportunity for active service.

When Porter joined his ship, late in February, 1847, the transports carrying General Scott's army were daily arriving at the rendezvous of the squadron. On the 5th of March they sailed to the anchorage at Anton Lizardo, a dozen miles southeast of Vera Cruz. The beach abreast of the island of Sacrificios, directly south of the entrance to the harbor and less than three miles from the city, was selected as the point for landing, and the troops were transferred to the ships of war, whose stations had been appointed, and whose crews manned the surf-boats in which the landing was to be effected.

Nothing could exceed the perfection with which this difficult movement was planned and carried out. Early on the morning of the 9th of March the surf-boats were towed in by the small steamers, the Spitfire taking fifteen that were manned from the Raritan. The ships of war followed them to Sacrificios, each one coming to anchor in her designated place. Each ship then picked up her complement of boats and transferred the troops in accordance with the prearranged assignment. The Prince-



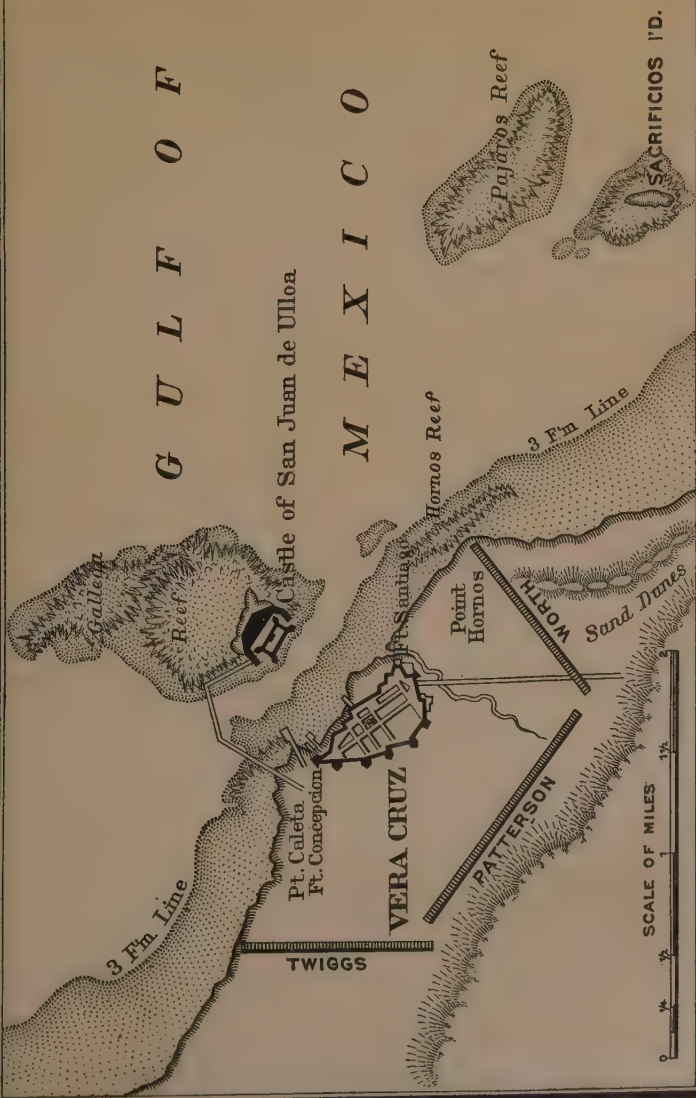
ton took a position abreast of the landing-place, the surf-boats formed astern of her in a double line ahead, according to regiments and companies, and in order of battle, the two head boats holding on to each quarter of the Princeton, the next two holding on to them, and so on, with a regimental flag flying in the leading boat of each regiment. At the same time the Mosquito Division anchored in line parallel to the shore and as close in as their draft allowed, to cover the landing, but it was unopposed, and a few shots were enough to drive off the stray parties of cavalry that were reconnoitering among the sand-hills. When all was ready the boats cast off and formed in line abreast, and pulling in to the beach, landed the troops, returning to their respective ships-for new boat-loads of troops as fast as the earlier detachments disembarked. By ten o'clock at night the whole army of ten thousand men, with stores and provisions, had been safely landed and the investment of the city was begun.

During the next ten days, General Scott was completing his line of investment, throwing up works, and getting his heavy guns in position. The center was commanded by General Patterson, the left wing by Twiggs, with his left drawing over toward Point Caleta, and the right wing by Worth, with his right resting on Point Hornos. In addition to the army batteries several heavy guns were landed by the squadron, and during the bombardment the Navy Battery, as it was called, which was manned from the fleet, did more damage than all the army guns put together. To divert attention from the preparations of the army, the Spitfire took a position under Point Hornos, and threw shot and shell into the city, to which the batteries of the castle and the nearest forts replied, but without effect.

On the 21st of March, Perry relieved Conner in the

G U L F O F

M E X I C O



J. HART NUTLEY N. J.

The harbor of Vera Cruz.



command of the squadron—a rather mortifying occurrence to Conner, as the forces were on the eve of an engagement. After keeping him in command for nine months from a mistaken desire to spare his feelings, the department superseded him at the very moment when his feelings were most likely to suffer from it.

Next day General Scott, having completed his investment, summoned the city and castle to surrender, and in the afternoon, receiving a defiant answer, opened fire from all his batteries. At the same time, the Spitfire took up her former position off Point Hornos, this time accompanied by the Vixen and five schooners, and all of them taking part in the bombardment. The general instructions to the flotilla were to remain under way inshore and occupy positions best calculated to annoy the enemy. The movement was successful as a diversion, and in disclosing the position of the enemy's guns to General Worth and the right wing.

Up to this time the flotilla, under its discretionary orders, had remained outside Point Hornos, owing to uncertainty as to the depth of water inside. Wishing to have the Spitfire in a better position, Porter volunteered to go in during the night in a boat and sound out the passage between the city and the castle, to find a good place for attacking the flanking batteries. In this difficult work Porter brought into play his experience in the Coast Survey, as well as his knowledge of the locality. During the whole night, while the flotilla was getting on board a fresh supply of ammunition, Porter was taking his soundings, and having assured himself as to the channel, returned to his ship.

At daybreak the Spitfire weighed in company with the Vixen, each with two schooners in tow, leaving the fifth schooner to attract the attention of the enemy, and stood

out from the land as if intending to join the squadron at Sacrificios. After clearing the Hornos Reef, which runs far out to the north and east of Point Hornos, the vessels changed their course and stood directly for the Castle of San Juan, Porter acting as pilot, and following the course that he had mapped out the night before. From this point the fire of the flotilla was able to silence the Castle of Santiago, forming the easternmost work of the city fortifications. Porter, still piloting the division, pushed on in his unconcerned way until he had reached a position within grape-shot distance of Santiago and but little farther from San Juan, and almost directly between the two. From this point the flotilla opened upon the city. The entire army and the fleet, including Perry, the commander-in-chief, watched the movement with breathless amazement and admiration ; and the latter, who was ignorant of the proposed plan, with no little anxiety. The Castle of San Juan, under the effect of the first surprise, did not reply at once, but after a short delay opened a terrific fire upon the little vessels, which seemed doomed to destruction, and which probably would have met their fate if the gunnery of the Mexicans had been more efficient. Shot and shell rained around them, keeping the water in a foam, but only three of them were struck, two of the schooners and the Spitfire, the latter by a shell which exploded directly under the quarter. Meantime they kept up an incessant fire on the castle. This was too much for Perry, who had no liking for movements that were not down on the program, and whose flag-ship was all the time lying at her anchorage, and he signaled the flotilla to withdraw ; but Tattnall, following the illustrious precedent set by Nelson at Cape St. Vincent, had told his quartermaster not to look toward the flag-ship, and the flotilla continued pounding away at the castle. Final-

ly, Perry sent his fleet captain, Mayo, on board the Spitfire with a peremptory order to retire immediately from action. This could not be disregarded, and the Spitfire and Vixen, which had been kept constantly moving during the attack, reluctantly withdrew, towing the gunboats out. As they rounded Point Hornos they were greeted by cheer upon cheer from the army on the neighboring shore, which was taken up by the bluejackets when the flotilla arrived at the anchorage of the squadron.

It may be said of this exploit of Tattnall and Porter, like that of Lord Charles Beresford in the Condor at Alexandria, that they ran a heavy risk in exposing the vessels of the flotilla to the concentrated fire of the two castles, and the question is, of course, raised and has been more or less discussed, whether the results that were gained, or possible to be gained, were commensurate with the risk. As far as the direct results on the forts were concerned, they were doubtless not sufficient to have repaid for the loss of the flotilla, had the flotilla been lost. But the flotilla was not lost, nor, although the crews were drenched with water splashed over them by the falling shot, was a single man hurt, which was partly due to the imperfect gunnery of the enemy, upon which the attacking force counted, and had a right to count, and partly to their own precautions in keeping their vessels in motion, and thus preventing the Mexicans from getting an accurate range. On the general principle that nothing succeeds like success, the success of the venture disarms all criticism. But the value of this particular exploit, done as it was under the eyes of a whole army and squadron, can not be measured by mere material results. Its moral effect, not so much in demoralizing the enemy as in giving a conspicuous example of daring and self-devotion, was worth all the material risks that attended it.

The morale of an army or of a fleet is perhaps its most important quality as a fighting force, especially with the rank and file, where the example of valor is almost as contagious as the example of fear. There was not a man in Scott's army or in Perry's fleet that saw the Mosquito Division holding its position under the cross-fire of the enemy's batteries, but found himself a better man for the sight and more ready to do his part when his own turn should come.

Except this attack by the flotilla, and the service of the battery ashore, nothing was done by the fleet in the bombardment. During the following days the Spitfire was employed in opening and maintaining communication with the left wing of the army, which had now reached a position resting on the shore near Point Caleta to the northward of the city. On the 27th the city and castle capitulated, and on the 29th they were occupied by the troops.

Immediately after the surrender of Vera Cruz, Perry organized an expedition to capture Alvarado, situated on the coast thirty miles farther south. Conner had already made two attempts on Alvarado, both of which had been unsuccessful. To retrieve the disasters, Perry organized a large expedition, with which a brigade under General Quitman was to cooperate. The Scourge, one of the small steamers of the flotilla, carrying one gun, was sent in advance to reconnoiter and to blockade the harbor. She was commanded by Lieutenant Hunter. It was fortunate for Tattnall that the Spitfire was not sent in her place, as he would undoubtedly have done exactly what Hunter did and possibly would have met Hunter's fate in consequence.

Arriving the day before the squadron, Hunter stood close in to the harbor, and seeing indications, as he



thought, of flinching on the part of the enemy, made a bold dash and captured the fort almost without resistance and with no loss. He then steamed up the river, leaving the surrendered post in charge of a midshipman and a couple of men, by whom it was turned over next day to Quitman's brigade. The squadron, arriving at the same time, found that Hunter was still up the river firing away at the works on the banks, as they could hear the report of his guns. The commander-in-chief was much incensed at what he deemed Hunter's excess of zeal, and actually had him court-martialed and dismissed from the squadron. Notwithstanding his sentence, Hunter, as might have been foreseen, was received with great enthusiasm upon his return home, and carried the name of "Alvarado Hunter" to his death.

In April, Perry made an attack upon Tuspan, a port some distance to the north of Vera Cruz, against which Conner had made another unsuccessful expedition, resulting in the loss of the brig Truxtun, whose guns had been captured and mounted in the fortifications on the river. The expedition was composed of the Spitfire and the other vessels of the Mosquito Division. There were also thirty barges, with detachments comprising a naval brigade of fifteen hundred men from the larger ships, and four howitzers.

On the morning of the 18th the flotilla crossed the bar, Perry hoisted his flag on board the Spitfire and led up the river to the attack, the steamers having the gunboats and barges in tow. The town was defended by three batteries, the first in a strong position on a high projecting bluff, which commanded the river below for two miles. The second was a water-battery mounting two long 18-pounders. On a hill in the center of the

town was a third fort, while a small battery defended the landing. All these works commanded the river approaches. Besides the artillery, bodies of infantry were posted in the works and in the thick chaparral along the river bank.

The natural strength of the position gave every advantage to the defense. As soon as the enemy opened fire, Perry ordered the steamers to cast off the gunboats and barges in tow. His plans had been well prepared and they were beautifully carried out. The three steamers opened on the forts to the right and left with a hot fire, Porter himself directing the pivot gun of the Spit-fire. The gunboats followed up under sail. After the forts had become demoralized by the flotilla's fire, Perry's powerful naval brigade was landed, and attacked the works, which they carried in a series of assaults. In a short time all of the forts were taken, the enemy were in full retreat, and Perry was master of Tuspan. Tatt-nall and several other officers of the flotilla were wounded, but Porter escaped without a scratch.

In June occurred the attack and capture of Tabasco, the most extensive independent operation attempted by the fleet during the war. Tabasco lies on the river of that name, seventy-five miles from its mouth. It was then the principal city of southern Mexico, and, although it had been raided the year before, no attempt had been made to hold it, and it was the center of the military operations of the Mexicans in that part of the country. A post was maintained by the invading army at Frontera, at the river mouth, where the blockading vessels lay. The movements of the Mexicans on the river caused some uneasiness, and constantly threatened the post. It was known that the banks were fortified with batteries much more powerful than any previously encountered,

and that the passage was defended by some sort of obstructions.

As with all Perry's expeditions, the preparations were made with care and thoroughness. The general plan was like that at Tuspan, but the enterprise was far more arduous. On the 13th of June the squadron anchored off the bar at the mouth of the Tabasco River. Next day the flotilla crossed the bar and moved up to Frontera—the Scorpion, with Perry's flag in the van, followed by the Spitfire, now commanded by Captain Lee, the Scourge, and the Vixen. Each of the steamers had gunboats in tow, with launches containing detachments from the ships. The day was passed in the ascent of the river as far as the obstructions, which were at a point called Punta del Diablo, the flotilla being under a scattering fire from the banks during the last twenty miles. Early on the morning of the 16th a party under Lieutenant May was sent up to sound the river and examine the obstructions. Directly opposite was a strong work which immediately opened a hot fire, wounding May and putting a stop to the examination. Perry now resolved to land with his naval brigade of twelve hundred men with ten 6-pounders, and march to the city, seven miles above, taking the fortifications on the way. The road lay through the thickest and most impassable chaparral. The unaccustomed difficulties of marching from which the sailors suffered were increased by the labor of dragging the ten field-guns by hand and carrying their ammunition and by the intense heat and the density of the forest. Perry was led to take this hazardous course by the supposed impossibility of passing the obstructions and the consequent delays.

Commander Bigelow, who was left in command of the flotilla, covered the landing of the brigade, which

barely succeeded in hauling the guns up the steep bank, and set out under command of Perry on its march. The flotilla thereupon turned its attention to the obstructions. With the flotilla was Captain Taylor, the submarine engineer mentioned in Porter's plan for the attack on San Juan, who had invented a method of raising sunken obstructions and had been sent out to the squadron with his apparatus. His plan was to fasten to the obstructions, by the aid of divers, rubber bags, which were then inflated by tubes from above, and which, by their buoyancy, caused the obstructions to rise. As soon as the naval brigade had got away, Bigelow took the steamers up to Punta del Diablo, and opened on the adjoining works so vigorously as to silence them, while Taylor went to work on the obstructions. The *chevaux-de-frise* of which they consisted were successfully raised, and the flotilla pushed up the river, thus getting ahead of Perry's forces, which were delayed by the difficulties of the march.

Silencing the works along the river-bank as it passed, the flotilla presently came in sight of the principal battery of the Mexicans, Fort Iturbide, mounting seven guns and containing a large garrison of artillery and infantry. This fort was just below the city of Tabasco. Without waiting for the naval brigade, the steamers opened a rapid fire upon the works. Under cover of this fire a little party of seventy seamen, led by Porter, was put on shore, and in one spirited charge rushed over the breastworks and captured the fort. When the brigade arrived later in the afternoon, it found its work accomplished and the United States flag flying from the flag-staff. It was well for the brigade that the flotilla got up, as the attempt to carry the fort by assault from the land side would no doubt have met with heavy loss. For their

conduct on this occasion Captain Lee was promoted to the flag-ship and Porter was made captain of the Spitfire. This was his first naval command.

After the capture and occupation of Tabasco, Perry returned to the squadron, leaving in charge Commander Van Brunt, of the Etna, and with him the Scorpion, Spitfire, and Scourge. The force of occupation was harassed by the incessant attacks of the Mexicans, in repelling which Porter and his bluejackets were occupied day and night, both in the town and in the outlying ranches, which gave shelter to the Mexican guerrillas in the neighborhood. These were the scene of frequent encounters, in which the guerrillas were gradually driven off, and by this means a secure foothold was established in the surrounding country. The Mexicans then concentrated at the village of Tamultay, several miles farther up the river, where the invading force attacked and defeated them, and so brought hostilities in the neighborhood of Tabasco to an end.

The expedition against Tabasco was the last of importance on the east coast of Mexico. General Scott with his army was now fighting his way to the capital, which, after a series of bloody battles, he captured and occupied in September. The blockade of the coast had now been turned everywhere into an occupation, and in all the captured ports naval officers were appointed governors, who again opened them to commerce and collected duties in the name of the United States. So matters continued until the end of the war.

On the 30th of July, 1847, Porter was detached from the command of the Spitfire and ordered home. In the letter detaching him, Perry said: "I take pleasure in expressing to you on the occasion of your leaving the squadron the high opinion I entertain of your merit as

a brave and zealous officer. If I had not before been aware of your superior qualifications, a reference to recent events would have satisfied me of the fact."

On his return Porter was employed on special duty at Boston and New York in charge of the purchase of auxiliary vessels for the navy. This duty occupied him until October, when he returned to Washington.

## CHAPTER V

### THE INTERVAL OF PEACE

ALTHOUGH the war just ended was not preeminently a naval war, it had afforded to Porter his opportunity, and he had turned it to the fullest advantage. Of the exploits in which the Gulf squadron took part, none were more conspicuous and gallant than the attack of the *Spitfire* and her consorts on the castles of Vera Cruz and the charge of Porter's bluejackets which carried the fort at Tabasco. Down to the time of his death, the admiral was accustomed to look back upon this last, and in the intimacy of his family to speak of it, with more vivid pleasure and satisfaction than any other engagement in his career. In both these actions, the part which Porter had played was well known throughout the service, and they crystallized and gave form and substance to a reputation which until then had been founded not upon actual achievement, but only on the probability of achievement in the future.

Nor did it lessen the brilliancy of Porter's success that others besides himself were doing their part at the same time to maintain the family tradition. His four brothers were all in service either in the navy or the army. The eldest, William D. Porter, who afterward commanded the *Essex* in the Rebellion and distinguished himself by the capture of the *Arkansas*, was at this time a lieutenant in Perry's squadron in the Gulf. A second, Theodoric Por-



ter, to whom David was especially attached, was a lieutenant in the Fourth Infantry, and was killed in battle at the very outset of the war; and for him David named his own son, born soon after, who has carried the name along with the family tradition in the navy of to-day. A third brother, Hambleton Porter, died of yellow fever while a passed midshipman in the Home squadron, as his brother Thomas had died, twenty years before, when a midshipman in the Mexican service. The fourth and youngest of the family, Henry Ogden Porter, destined to survive to fight Semmes in the Alabama, was at this time a midshipman, among the earliest of the students of Secretary Bancroft's newly founded academy.

Nor was this all—for the number of those who in this single family devoted themselves to the service of their country was almost without a parallel in our history. The brother of the old commodore of the Essex, John Porter, who had died a commander in the navy in 1831, had two sons who likewise kept up the tradition. The elder, Fitz-John Porter, afterward major-general, then a second lieutenant of artillery, served with Scott's army through its bloody campaign, was brevetted captain and major for gallantry at Molino del Rey and Chapultepec, and was wounded in the final attack on the capital. The younger, Bolton Porter, at this time a passed midshipman, was afterward lost at sea in the ill-fated *Levant*. Still a third nephew, David H. Porter, the son of the commodore's sister, as has been already told, after rising to the rank of lieutenant in the navy, had gone with his uncle into the Mexican service, and had been killed, while little more than a boy, in the battle between the *Guerrero* and the *Lealtad*.

There were thus nine sons in the families of the elder Porters who served in the army or the navy. Three

had died in the discharge of their duty before the war broke out. Of the remaining six, four were in active service, either on shore or afloat, during the war, and each had made for himself a record of gallantry that distinguished him above his comrades. With David Porter the effect of the war and of the influences and associations connected with it, and with his family's share in it, reached to the profoundest depths of his strenuous and ardent nature. He, as well as the others who survived, had set for themselves a new standard of heroic effort, actually realized and made thenceforth a part of their life. To his brothers and cousins who were in active service it was their first war experience; to him it was the renewal of those early sensations belonging to the dawn of precocious manhood, the recollection of which for twenty years he had passionately cherished, and now for the first time could live over again in all their intense and vital reality.

But the war was now over, and Porter and the navy at large settled down to a period of dull and monotonous routine. It was to last for only thirteen years, but at the outset it seemed that it would last forever. The conditions then prevailing in the service made it a peculiarly discouraging period to all, but to Porter perhaps more than to most of his comrades. He was now thirty-five years old, and still a junior lieutenant. He had the routine of his profession at his fingers' ends, and in the position of a lieutenant at that time there was little more that he could learn. He had tasted for a few brief weeks the pleasures of command, and he had no desire to go back to a subordinate station. Growth, progress, development, were a law of his being, and he could not be content with standing still, much less with retrogression. The narrow round of a watch-officer's duties in a sailing

ship, which was rarely sailing, could only mean retrogression. It was worse than marking time. It meant the apathy that comes from the enforced suppression of individual judgment, the rust begotten of routine, the deadening of the faculties by disuse, the contraction of the mental horizon. The peculiar isolation of a naval officer's life and the limited scope of his profession at that day increased tenfold the force of these influences, and Porter, as far as he could, refused to submit to them.

His service during this period, at least in respect to naval distinction, as has been already said, was of the most commonplace character. Much of it was not, narrowly speaking, as most officers would speak, naval service at all. Yet in another and a broader sense, as providing the technical experience of which he stood most in need, it was in the highest degree professional service. For two years he was attached to the Coast Survey. This over, he applied for leave of absence, and secured an appointment as captain of the *Panama*, one of the new line of steamers belonging to the New York firm of Howland & Aspinwall, intended for service on the Pacific coast. For the moment this suited his purpose better than anything else he could have done. He wanted experience in handling steamers, and he wanted a command; and in this way he got both. He took the *Panama* to the Pacific through the Straits of Magellan. Returning home after a time, he took the command of the *Georgia*, one of the line of steamers owned by Law, Roberts & Co., which had been established by George Law to carry the mails between San Francisco and New York under the Sloo contract. He commanded this ship for two years, making regular trips from New York to Havana and Chagres.

Porter next entered the service of the Australian

Steamship Company, as captain of the *Golden Age*, which, under his command, became one of the most famous of the fast steamers of her day. Her first passage to Australia cut down the time of the voyage nearly one-half. She ran for six months on the Australian coast, under Porter as captain, finally returning on a record voyage from Sydney to Panama via Tahiti. At Panama he gave up the ship, and came home, where he remained for several months recovering from the effects of an attack of Isthmus fever.

Porter's next occupation was one of the most singular in which he ever engaged. The War Department at this time was attempting to solve the difficult problem of army transportation in the remote stations of the newly acquired territory in the Southwest. The Mexican War had added this vast region to our possessions. It was peopled chiefly by Indians, who were barely held in check by a few scattered army posts and garrisons. To meet the wants of the army arising from these conditions some one conceived the novel idea of a camel-train. The suggestion was adopted with considerable interest by Jefferson Davis, the able Secretary of War of Pierce's Cabinet, and Major Henry C. Wayne, of the army, was detailed to carry it out. The Navy Department loaned for the transportation of the camels the store-ship *Supply*, and Porter was assigned to the command, and thus associated with Wayne in the performance of the work.

Porter sailed for the Mediterranean in the *Supply* in May, 1855, with the usual cargo of stores for the squadron. She was to bring over the camels on her return voyage. Neither Wayne nor Porter—nor, indeed, anybody else connected with the undertaking—knew anything of camels or their habits, or of the conditions necessary for their care and transportation, especially on ship-

board. Porter, however, went into the work with his characteristic ardor. Fantastic as the project seemed, and strongly as some phases of it must have appealed to his sense of humor, which was always active even in the most serious occupations, he seemed to have only one idea, which was to make the efforts of his colleague of the army a success. He threw himself with so much zeal into the preparations that Wayne, when he visited the Supply in New York preparatory to sailing, wrote to Secretary Davis: "You know already my estimate of Lieutenant Porter's abilities; but I must add that, in the completeness and thoroughness of the details, he has far exceeded my most sanguine expectations." Eight years later, during the campaign of Vicksburg, Davis as the Confederate President had still further opportunities of learning of the thoroughness of Porter's preparations and the ability with which he carried them out.

About the middle of July the Supply arrived at Spezia and discharged her stores. Thence, after a visit to the zoological collections at Florence and Pisa, Porter proceeded to Tunis, where two camels were procured, whose habits could be studied before the entire herd was purchased. Touching at Smyrna and Salonica, the Supply arrived in October at Constantinople. Wayne and Porter took this occasion to visit the Crimea, where the war was then at its height. They were hospitably received by General Simpson at his headquarters at Balaklava, where they found Major Delafield, the military *attaché* of the United States. They also met several officers who had served in General Napier's expedition against Scinde, where the general had organized a camel-corps of five hundred dromedaries, mounting a thousand men. Apart from the question of camels, Porter was glad of the opportunity to see something of the active

operations of the war, and of the men engaged in conducting them, in all of which he took the keenest interest.

From Constantinople the Supply proceeded to Alexandria and Smyrna, and enough camels were selected and bought to make a cargo of thirty-three. On the 15th of February the ship left Smyrna on her voyage home, and arrived off Indianola, in Texas, on the 29th of April. Porter was indefatigable in his care of the camels during the voyage, and only one of them died on the way home. The remainder were landed in Texas on the 14th of May.

In the summer of 1856 Porter made a second trip in the Supply to the Mediterranean for camels, following the same program as in the previous year. At the end of six months he arrived off the mouth of the Mississippi with his second cargo of forty-four camels, most of which had also been purchased at Smyrna. This ended his connection with the establishment of the camel-train for the army. The project, so successful in its beginning, ended in failure. Davis shortly after went out of office, and either because nobody else took any interest in the plan or because of the death of a number of the camels, the efforts of Wayne and Porter had no further result. The camels that had not died ran away, and their descendants were seen from time to time wandering over the great plains of the Southwest, a terrifying object to such horses as chanced to fall in with them. They were the only tangible remains of Davis's unsuccessful project.

Porter was detached from his ship, and on the 29th of April, 1857, was ordered to the navy-yard at Portsmouth, where he remained for three years. His office was that of "first lieutenant of the yard," and his duties were those of a general executive officer under the commandant and the captain. Although, as may be

imagined, in the existing routine of the naval service, the first lieutenant was the man who did the work, his post was not a very exacting one. Torpid and apathetic as was the whole naval establishment during the fifties, there was probably no more somnolent branch of it than the Portsmouth station. The yard has never been overworked, and, except for the building of the steam-sloop Mohican, which was slowly progressing during this period, and the casual and infrequent visits of ships of war, little or nothing took place to disturb the repose of its officers. A little repair work was going on, a vessel occasionally arrived at the yard and was put out of commission, and now and then a vessel was fitted out for sea, but for the most part months passed without even such small incidents. The venerable chronicler of the yard, Admiral Preble, says of this period: "The gun park, shot park, anchor parks, and the small park in front of the commandant's house were made and the present flagstaff erected in place of the old one. Many of these improvements were due to the good taste and energy of Lieutenant Porter." There is something almost pathetic in the picture of a man of Porter's spirit and power tied down to these trivial occupations, under the direction of the commandant and the captain; but it was fortunate that he had something upon which to expend his "good taste and energy," even if it consisted only of flagstaffs and gun parks. In the summer of 1860 Porter was detached from the yard and placed for a short time in command of the *Constitution*, which he took to Annapolis to be used as a school-ship for the Naval Academy. Thence he proceeded to Washington, taking his family with him, and making it for the time his home.

It is not surprising that at this stage of his career Porter was so convinced of the necessity of making a radical



change in his life that he decided to resign from the service and take permanent employment in command of one of the vessels of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. He felt that as far as the navy was concerned, he had reached a condition of stagnation, and that he must pull himself together, and in some way work into the current of life and affairs around him. For taking the first plunge, this seemed as good a way as any other, and it was the only course readily open to him. To assist in carrying out his purpose, he obtained orders in September, 1860, to Coast-Survey duty in the Pacific. The execution of the orders was, however, temporarily delayed, and they were destined in the end never to be carried out.

The sources of Porter's dissatisfaction did not lie in Porter himself or in his friends. His high professional qualities were known and recognized by his brother officers. He had entered the service after a preparatory experience and training of the most exceptional character. He belonged to what was, with the possible exception of two others—those of Perry and Rodgers—the most distinguished family in naval annals. His home during most of his life had been in Washington, which was then virtually a Southern capital, with a society closely attached to the successive administrations that had in turn represented for fifty years the dominant party in the country. Porter's connections, both by birth and marriage, had given him a conspicuous place in this society, and the great clan to which he belonged, comprising the Dallasses, the Baches, the Pattersons, and other important families, had always had a commanding political and social influence; so much so that during the Polk administration, when they had representatives in the vice-presidency and at the head of the War Department and the Treasury, they had been familiarly known as the "Co-

burgs," a name which afterward passed into a broader use. This sort of influence, however, could only have affected Porter by obtaining for him easy and attractive details suitable to his rank, which was not what he wanted. It may have had something to do with the fact that his four cruises had been to the Mediterranean, and that his shore-service, except during the last three years, had been in and about Washington. But neither his native qualities nor any other consideration could advance Porter a single step in the inflexible order of the officers on the navy list, where his advancement followed the simple and mechanical rule of seniority promotion, or give him a more important part in naval administration.

It is therefore hardly to be wondered at that Porter, when he returned to Washington in 1860, notwithstanding the natural buoyancy of his disposition, should have become profoundly dissatisfied with his professional career. He found himself at forty-seven years of age, and with over thirty years of service, still a lieutenant and still a considerable distance from the head of his grade. The two grades above him, those of captain and commander—at this time there were no admirals, and commodore was only a title of courtesy—contained some two hundred officers. Porter had brought to the service a training which none of his contemporaries possessed; and during his whole career, in every station in which he had been placed, he had devoted himself with the keenest zest and with a clear and trained intelligence to doing his utmost to carry out with success the work that he had in hand. He knew that in every other walk of life such efforts would have been crowned with results in the way of advancement, distinction, commanding influence, or other rewards. For him, no matter what he did, there was no reward. He might do well or ill, accomplish great things



David D. Porter in 1860.



or nothing at all; but in either case his course would proceed at the same slow rate of progress along the same monotonous pathway. Even apart from the question of advancement and reward, had his occupations been such as to call into play his best powers, he might still have been content; but with two hundred officers above him on the list, it seemed inevitable that he should remain for a long time performing the routine duties of subordinate stations which, for thirty years, he had known by heart, and which were of such a character that during their continuance the exercise of original judgment and individual discretion was practically denied him. Conscious, as he could not help being, of his fitness for naval command, of his capacity for rapid and efficient work, with a nature full of energy and alertness, he knew that his life was wasted in a career which up to this time and during half a century of his life had afforded him, except during a few months of war, nothing better than a store-ship for a command afloat and a junior place at a minor navy-yard for administrative duty on shore; and which seemed to have little more in prospect in the near future.

The condition of the naval personnel at this period was very nearly one of absolute stagnation. In the upper grades of the list it was precisely the reverse of that at the outbreak of the War of 1812. The grade of captain then comprised a score of officers, nearly all of them young men, who had been culled out from a much larger body under the Peace Establishment Act of 1801, by which two-thirds of the officers then in the service had been retired to private life. Perry was twenty-six years old when he won the battle of Lake Erie, and McDonough was twenty-seven when he commanded at Lake Champlain. The elder Porter was thirty-two when he made his cruise in the Essex. Decatur had won his

commission as a captain at twenty-four, after only five years in the service, and he was thirty-three when he captured the Macedonian. These facts account in large measure for the splendid audacity with which our ships were commanded in the earlier war.

In 1860, as we have said, the conditions at the head of the navy list were exactly reversed. For nearly half a century, with the unimportant exception of the war with Mexico, the country had been at peace. As there was no system of retirement, and as promotion was solely on the basis of seniority, the upper part of the list was filled with officers who had grown too old for active service, but who, nevertheless, felt that their positions entitled them to important commands at sea and to high places in council and in administration. For these duties most of them were unfit. A considerable number of them had been men of merely ordinary ability at the start and would not have reached a place in the front rank of any other profession. As to these, their only accomplishment was that of handling a ship under sail at sea, and they had reached their elevated position by the simple process of survival. As to the others, whatever qualities of brain and nerve they might have once possessed had weakened with age and become rusted by a lifetime of routine. Of course there were a few extraordinary exceptions, but with these exceptions the captains as a body were distinctly unfitted for any kind of service.

Not only were the officers at the head of the list thus disqualified, but their continuance on the list, by blocking promotion, had had a most injurious effect upon the officers below them. In the second grade, that of commander, the officers at the head of the grade were sixty years old. In the third grade, that of lieutenant, the upper men were between forty-eight and fifty, and some

of them even past fifty. Hardly any had yet risen to the responsibilities of the smallest naval command. No matter what qualities a man might possess at the outset, such a prolonged continuance in a subordinate station must sap his energies and convert him into a mere machine—especially in a military service, where subordination was the cardinal principle of the organization, and above all in service afloat, where all real authority and responsibility rested with the captain of the ship. Nor did the older officers do anything to correct this tendency. On the contrary, they consciously or unconsciously encouraged it. The assumption of responsibility by junior officers was neither desired nor permitted, and a subordinate who presumed to act upon his own judgment was apt to bring down upon himself official censure. No better illustration of this can be furnished than that of Hunter at Alvarado, who was court-martialed and dismissed the squadron for showing too much energy in the capture of the enemy's forts. The result was that junior officers early became imbued with the idea that until they rose to the highest rank their minds were to be exercised not for the general welfare of the profession, but only to carry out the orders of a superior. New and young blood came into the service, but exerted no influence upon it. Its fresh qualities were lost long before it got really into circulation, and by that time it had so long been stagnant that it produced no effect. The leaders in professional thought and opinion, with the few exceptions that have been referred to, were leaders only by virtue of rank. They were dull men of routine with a narrow range of vision, whose only object was to preserve unchanged the existing order of things and who frowned upon anything like a progressive spirit.

Of course the conditions in the navy to-day are com-



pletely changed, and the character of the officers has changed with them. The Civil War made an upheaval, the effects of which are still felt throughout the service. The aged and infirm were retired. Officers passed almost at a bound through a whole grade. The Southern officers, old and young, resigned in a body, and made room for the promotion of those who remained. Four years of war made veterans of the whole body of officers, while the creation of the Naval Academy, whose graduates were then just rising into notice in the junior grades, gave them a training which enabled them to exert their energies with the highest intelligence. The officers who graduated from the academy just before and during the war, whose names are now so familiar, such as Dewey, McCalla, and the captains at the battle of Santiago, passed quickly through the lower grades, and nearly all of them had attained a rank six years after their graduation from the Naval Academy higher than that which Porter had reached after thirty-two years in the service. Porter himself, after waiting nearly half a century to reach the dignity of a captain, never had the satisfaction of bearing that honored title. The fact, too, that the highest commands were given to officers on account of their fitness and largely irrespective of rank, had its influence throughout the service; for the younger men were formed by the new leaders. Of all these leaders, none had so much to do as Porter with the forming of the future navy.

Last of all, but no less important, the tremendous and rapid development in modern ships and weapons brought about by the application of progressive science to their construction and equipment has made necessary in the naval officer of to-day an extent of intellectual capacity and acquisition that were not dreamed of in the earlier

period. The pervading spirit of routine and conservatism which held the service in 1860 in a condition of stagnation, has given place under these influences to an intellectual activity, a breadth of view, an indefatigable spirit of progress, and a universal effort for the development of the service which is shared alike by the young and old from the admiral to the junior ensign. The result is that, while in 1860 the personnel of the navy was suffering from influences as retrogressive as could well be imagined, it is to-day easily abreast, if not in advance, of that of every other country in the world.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CIVIL WAR—CRUISE OF THE POWHATAN

THE events of the winter of 1860-'61 did not shake Porter's determination to go to the Pacific, with a view ultimately to entering a career in private life. On the contrary, they rather confirmed it. It was with no slight impatience and dissatisfaction that he watched the temporizing policy of the Buchanan Cabinet; and what appeared a continuation of the same policy during the first weeks of the Lincoln administration did not encourage him to believe that the Government would have the resolution to crush the rebellion by force of arms. Under these circumstances, and perhaps all the more because of them, Porter adhered to his intention of abandoning the service.

But events moved swiftly in April, 1861, and a single hour was enough to change the face of the situation. On the very eve of his departure from Washington to carry out his purpose, Porter was selected for a most confidential and unusual service. Before he had sailed upon this service the war had virtually begun. Upon his return from his first expedition he was brought directly to the front, and thereafter shared with one other officer of the navy the most important responsibilities and the highest commands during four years of war, and achieved a distinction which ultimately brought him without question to the head of the service.

Remarkable as Porter's advancement was, it can not be said to have been due in any degree to political or social influence. Family interest, such as he might have had fifteen or twenty years before, counted for little with the new administration, and such political influence as Porter commanded was now in opposition. The real reason for his advancement lay in the man himself. During the whole course of his service in the navy he had so impressed himself upon his superiors and upon his contemporaries that he was recognized from the moment that the crisis came as a man with qualities that specially fitted him to meet it. This was strengthened by his service during the Mexican War. But that which distinguished him from others, and gave him a reputation apart, was the conviction, founded upon the close observation and intimate association that prevail in man-of-war life, that besides the technical knowledge which he possessed in common with many of his comrades, he had to an uncommon degree those qualities of independent judgment, boldness, energy, and tenacity, combined with a rapid and instinctive strategic perception, which mark the greatest of naval commanders. In addition, he had a certain mental habit, rarely found in its full development in such an eager and original nature, but almost equally impressive in ship life, of careful and exact attention to important details of preparation.

It is a common impression about Porter, founded upon his impulsiveness of speech and quickness of action, that his professional qualities were all in the direction of boldness and dash in execution, and that his mental outfit was brilliant rather than substantial. This is far from being the fact. Porter had boldness and dash when they were needed, but always, as far as the time given made it possible, he took the utmost pains in the arrange-

ment of details beforehand. His executive forethought was one of his distinguishing traits. He was not fussy or overminute, and he was never tied down by any preconceived theories to the use of a particular instrument or agency when any other would do as well; but he looked narrowly into the conditions that were to confront him, and took care to be ready to meet them. No routine was too well established for him to disregard it, but no essential factor of success was too microscopic for him to give it painstaking attention. The care with which long in advance he planned his reconnaissance at the New Orleans forts is a good illustration of this quality. His life during the war was full of such illustrations: they were shown throughout his whole career on the Mississippi, and later on the Atlantic coast. It was the possession of these exceptional and varied qualities, and the faculty of compelling, by his force and directness of expression, a recognition of them by others, that raised Porter to a position of the highest authority.

The first episode in Porter's career in the Civil War was unique in the history of the navy. It could only have come about in the exceptional conditions that then existed. The winter of 1860-'61 had witnessed the secession of a large number of States and the efforts of a demoralized Government to prevent, by a policy of self-effacement, a further disintegration. On the 4th of March Mr. Lincoln came into office, without experience in administrative business, representing a new party, and surrounded by a Cabinet of somewhat divergent political views. The Government departments were still largely filled with secessionists. Information of military measures filtered through to the insurgent governors. Incompetence and procrastination, combined with the unwillingness to force an issue with the South, had lost or

were losing to the Union nearly every important military and naval post in the insurgent territory, Fort Sumter, at Charleston, and Fort Pickens, at Pensacola, being the only forts of importance of which the National forces still retained possession.

The situation at Pensacola during the entire winter was critical. Pensacola Bay is a large sheet of water, separated from the Gulf by Santa Rosa Island, a narrow stretch of sand forty miles long. At the western end of the island is Fort Pickens, and between it and Fort McRee, on the opposite mainland, a mile across, is the entrance to the bay. The shore to the north of McRee curves around to the eastward to Fort Barrancas and the navy-yard, and seven miles farther up to Pensacola. In January, 1861, the only garrison at Pensacola was a company of artillery under Lieutenant Slemmer, which was quartered at the barracks near the old Fort Barrancas. At the navy-yard were well-equipped workshops and a large depot of military stores, protected only by a marine guard, while two small naval vessels were lying in the harbor.

On the 10th of January Lieutenant Slemmer moved his command over to Santa Rosa Island and occupied Fort Pickens, the only point that he could hold with his small force. On the 12th Commodore Armstrong, commanding the navy-yard, surrendered it without resistance. The only naval property saved was that afloat in the two ships. The State troops immediately took possession of the yard and the forts on the mainland. The surrender of Pickens was demanded, but its gallant commander, with his diminutive garrison, showed a determined front, and the attempts to dislodge him were unsuccessful.

On the 21st of January the Brooklyn was sent to

Pensacola with a small detachment of artillery under Captain Vogdes. She was ordered to land the troops outside near Fort Pickens, and to cooperate with the garrison. Even this cautious order was shortly modified by instructions not to land the detachment unless Pickens was attacked. The ship was directed not to enter the harbor, but to "act strictly on the defensive." The Sabine and St. Louis, two sailing vessels belonging to the Home squadron, were also despatched to Pensacola under similar restrictive orders.

As was his usual custom, Porter did not hesitate to express himself freely about the course of events to the officers with whom he was in frequent intercourse in Washington, both of the army and navy. As to the measures to be taken for the relief of Fort Pickens, he was convinced not only that the fort should be succored, but that the National forces should recover Pensacola. The ordnance and war material captured at the navy-yard and the army posts were an invaluable acquisition to the States in rebellion, and it was plain that action should be taken before they were removed from Pensacola, and before the old forts now occupied by the Florida troops were put in a state of defense. To reenforce Pickens with an ample garrison, to make a dash with a naval force into the bay, where the reenforcement could be effectually covered, and to take the offensive in every possible way, seemed to Porter the obvious plan for the recovery of Pensacola. Among other officers who shared his views was Captain Montgomery C. Meigs, of the Corps of Engineers, who had been recently stationed in Florida, and who subsequently became quartermaster-general.

Meantime, the Government forces remained on the defensive. The Brooklyn arrived in February, but her orders prevented her from relieving the fort. Finally,



on the 1st of April, the War Department ordered Vogdes to land; but Captain Adams of the *Sabine*, the senior officer of the naval force, refused to allow it because of his previous instructions from the Navy Department. Vogdes and his men thus remained prisoners on board the *Brooklyn*. The detachment was too small for a substantial reenforcement, but Slemmer urgently needed every man he could have. The situation, for all its appalling gravity, was little less than farcical: Slemmer, almost at the end of his resources, nightly expecting an attack and appealing for help; Vogdes and his men on board the vessel, lying off the fort, under peremptory orders of the War Department to join the garrison; Adams, controlling the ships of war, interpreting his orders two months old with narrow and obstinate literalness, in the face of the War Department's action; and the cumbrous machinery of the Navy Department not yet in motion to break the deadlock. It was not until the 12th of April that it got an order to the fleet, and the company of eighty men were landed. Even then nothing was done to utilize the ships.

The situation at Charleston was somewhat different. In December, Major Anderson had transferred his command to Fort Sumter. While Fort Pickens was perfectly accessible to a fleet, the approach to Sumter was defended by powerful Confederate batteries. On the 9th of January an unsuccessful attempt was made to reenforce Sumter by the steamer *Star of the West*, which was fired upon by the batteries at Morris Island, and turned back. Nothing more was done for its relief during the Buchanan administration.

When Mr. Lincoln assumed office one of the most pressing questions before him was that of the reenforcement of Sumter and Pickens. The military adviser of the

administration, General Scott, whatever may have been his great abilities at an earlier period, was now a vacillating and feeble old man. During March he came to the conclusion that both forts should be evacuated. Mr. Seward, the new Secretary of State, who took an active interest in all branches of the administration, appears to have agreed with him as to Sumter. Notwithstanding these opinions, the President, on the 29th of March, determined to succor the garrison at Sumter, and informed the Cabinet of his decision in a written memorandum. The War and Navy Departments immediately made preparations for the expedition. The details were placed in charge of Captain Fox, formerly an officer of the navy, who was now occupying a close but unofficial relation to the administration. His plan contemplated the use of three powerful tugs, a large transport steamer, and three small ships of war.

In the President's memorandum, the ships named for the Charleston expedition were the Pocahontas, the Pawnee, and the revenue-cutter Harriet Lane, and they were ordered to be in readiness for service on the 6th of April. No mention was made in the memorandum of the Powhatan. This vessel had arrived at New York from Vera Cruz on the 13th of March, and, as her machinery was worn out, the Navy Department, on the 28th, ordered her to be laid up. On the 1st of April her stores were landed, her crew transferred to the receiving-ship, her captain, Mercer, and other officers were given leave of absence, and the ship was put out of commission.

About this time Fox concluded that the force assigned him was insufficient, and he asked for the addition of the Powhatan. The Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Welles, accordingly telegraphed the commandant at New York on the 1st of April, revoking the previous orders,

and directing him to fit out the Powhatan for sea at the earliest possible moment. On the 2d the Secretary ordered the commandant to recall the officers. On the 3d another telegram from the department urged despatch in the preparation of the ship. On the 5th the telegram of the 3d was repeated, and detailed orders were sent to Captain Mercer, notifying him that he was to take part in the expedition to Fort Sumter, and directing him, if the entrance of the ships was opposed, to force his way to the fort. A rendezvous off Charleston was fixed for the 11th, and like orders were sent to the other ships, directing them to report to Mercer at the rendezvous. On the 5th Foote, the acting commandant of the yard, reported the Powhatan ready for sea, but on the same day the Secretary ordered her sailing to be delayed for further instructions.

In the meantime Fox was having great difficulty in preparing the other branches of the expedition. He went to New York on the 30th of March with instructions to prepare for the voyage, but to make no binding engagements. On the 2d of April he returned to Washington to obtain further authority. The President still hesitated, and it was not until April 4 that he finally decided to let the expedition go. He was not, however, informed that the Powhatan had been added to it. In Fox's subsequent report he states: "The Powhatan, which had recently returned and gone out of commission, was added to the force I designated, to enable me to have her fine boats and crew for landing the supplies. I suggested to the Secretary of the Navy to place Commodore Stringham in command of the naval force, but upon consulting with that distinguished officer he considered it 'too late to be successful and likely to ruin the reputation of the officer who undertook it then.'"

Fox returned to New York on the 5th of April. By dint of great efforts he secured two tugs, and fitted out the steamship *Baltic* as a transport.

The *Harriet Lane* arrived first at the rendezvous. On the 12th she was joined by the *Baltic* and the *Pawnee*. The *Pocahontas* did not come until the next afternoon, followed a day later by one of the tugs. On the morning of the 12th the *Baltic* stood in toward the bar with the *Harriet Lane*. At the same time fire was opened on Fort Sumter from the surrounding batteries. The bombardment lasted two days, at the end of which the fort surrendered. Nothing could be done by the relief expedition, as "it was the opinion of the officers that no boats with any load in them could reach Sumter in this heavy sea, and no tugboats had arrived." Fox thought that the failure of the expedition was partly, if not chiefly, due to the non-arrival of the *Powhatan*. It is difficult to see, however, that her presence would have affected the result, in view of the strong defenses of Charleston.

The *Powhatan* did not arrive because she had been ordered elsewhere.

Two days after the President had decided to relieve Fort Sumter (although the fact was not publicly known), as Porter, on the evening of the 1st of April, was having his last dinner with his family prior to his departure for New York, to take the steamer for California, he was surprised to receive a note from the Secretary of State requesting his presence. Porter immediately waited upon the Secretary, who asked him if he could devise a plan by which Fort Pickens could be saved. To this Porter promptly answered that he could, and stated his plan, which was to take a considerable force of troops on a transport, convoyed by a ship of war, with a full supply of munitions of war, and land them at the fort

under the ship's guns, the ship herself forcing an entrance into the bay, and, with the cooperation of the other vessels present, preventing the enemy at any cost from reaching Santa Rosa. His purpose was to operate vigorously against the Confederate forts, for his entrance into the harbor would probably bring on an engagement. Presently Seward was joined by Captain Meigs, who had made the first suggestion of sending for Porter, and who took part in the discussion. The Secretary then asked Porter and Meigs to accompany him to the White House. Here they were received by the President. The plan was laid before him, considered and discussed again, and, after further explanation, adopted. It was also decided that the Powhatan, which Porter knew had arrived and been ordered out of commission, should be taken for the expedition; that Porter should command her; and that the orders should be issued directly by the President, without the intervention of the Secretary of the Navy, and even without his knowledge. The President expressed doubt as to the propriety of such a course, but, being pressed by Mr. Seward, who reassured him on that point, with Porter's concurrence, he acquiesced and signed the necessary orders.

None of the four persons who took part in this extraordinary council knew that the Powhatan was already intended by Secretary Welles for the expedition to Sumter. Even if Mr. Welles had mentioned it to the President, the fact was not likely to impress itself upon his mind, and of course neither Mr. Seward, Captain Meigs, nor Lieutenant Porter was aware of it. All of them were aware that the mode of proceeding was in the highest degree irregular, and that no Secretary of the Navy could possibly conduct his office if naval affairs were to be managed in any such fashion. All of them should have

pointed out to the President the evident danger of a conflict of authority from such a course; and Porter must bear his full share of the blame. But it must be said for Porter that the times were peculiar; that he had been summoned to a confidential interview at the White House, from which the Secretary was obviously and intentionally excluded; that the Powhatan had been laid up; and that the President had designated other vessels for the Charleston expedition, which had itself been placed, in a most irregular way, in the charge of Fox, who was not even an officer. The question was one for the President, as commander-in-chief, to decide, and Lieutenant Porter, though he may have wrongly contributed to influence the decision, was too small and incidental a factor in the situation to be charged with the principal responsibility. The real culprit was the Secretary of State, than whom no one knew better that it was impossible to have independent military operations carried on in this manner, and who took advantage of the President's inexperience in executive business.

The orders for this extraordinary commission were drawn in official form at the interview by Porter, copied by Captain Meigs, and signed by the President. The first order to Porter was as follows:

EXECUTIVE MANSION, *April 1, 1861.*

SIR: You will proceed to New York, and with the least possible delay assume command of any naval steamer available. Proceed to Pensacola Harbor, and at any cost or risk prevent any expedition from the mainland reaching Fort Pickens or Santa Rosa.

You will exhibit this order to any naval officer at Pensacola, if you deem it necessary after you have established yourself within the harbor, and will request cooperation by the entrance of at least one other vessel.

This order, its object, and your destination will be communicated to no person whatever until you reach the harbor of Pensacola.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

*Lieutenant D. D. PORTER, U. S. Navy.*

*Recommended:*

WM. H. SEWARD.

The second order was to Captain Mercer:

WASHINGTON CITY, *April 1, 1861.*

SIR: Circumstances render it necessary to place in command of your ship, and for a special purpose, an officer who is duly informed and instructed in relation to the wishes of the Government, and you will therefore consider yourself detached; but in taking this step the Government does not intend in the least to reflect upon your efficiency or patriotism; on the contrary, have the fullest confidence in your ability to perform any duty required of you.

Hoping soon to be able to give you a better command than the one you now enjoy, and trusting that you will have full confidence in the disposition of the Government toward you, I remain,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

*Captain SAMUEL MERCER, U. S. Navy.*

The third order was to the commandant of the navy-yard:

EXECUTIVE MANSION, *April 1, 1861.*

SIR: You will fit out the Powhatan without delay. Lieutenant Porter will relieve Captain Mercer in command of her. She is bound on secret service, and you will, under no circumstances, communicate to the Navy Department the fact that she is fitting out.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

*Commandant Navy-Yard, New York.*

These were accompanied by a sort of *carte blanche*, to secure general assistance and cooperation:



EXECUTIVE MANSION, *April 1, 1861.*

Lieutenant D. D. Porter will take command of the steamer Powhatan, or any other United States steamer ready for sea which he may deem most fit for the service to which he has been assigned by confidential instructions of this date.

All officers are commanded to afford him all such facilities as he may deem necessary for getting to sea as soon as possible. He will select the officers who are to accompany him.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

*Recommended:*

WM. H. SEWARD.

The orders bear upon their face the obvious marks of Porter's authorship. No one else who took part in the conference was familiar with the peculiar turns of expression employed in naval orders, which appear throughout. Even so, naval precedent did not furnish an exact guide in so novel a situation; and it is to be noticed that when Porter had established himself in the harbor, he was to *request* the cooperation of the other ships of war at Pensacola, whose captains were all his seniors. The President's letter would doubtless be sufficient to effect their compliance, though they would not, in cooperating, be under Porter's command. Whether Porter, with the President's letter in his hand, would be under the command of the senior officer present was a question which would have to be settled on the spot, and which Porter, in drawing the order, evidently evaded.

Equally characteristic of Porter was the effort which he plainly made to spare the feelings of Captain Mercer. To be summarily relieved of the command of his ship, under an order from the President, by an officer so far his junior in rank as to be actually, from the naval point of view, ineligible for it, would seem to imply grave dis-

satisfaction with Mercer himself. Hence the disclaimer, the strong expressions of confidence, and the hint, amounting substantially to a promise, of a better command in the future.

The letter to the commandant of the navy-yard was clear and positive. He was ordered directly to fit out the Powhatan and turn her over to Porter. He, as well as all other officers of the navy, was to afford Porter all the facilities which the latter might deem necessary in getting his vessel to sea. Above all, he was plainly told that he was under no circumstances to inform the Navy Department that the ship was fitting out.

When Porter and Meigs left the White House after the interview Porter believed, and with good reason, that he was to command a naval expedition of which the reenforcement of Fort Pickens was one of the objects, but of which the main purpose was to enter and recover the harbor of Pensacola. Probably the President was under the same impression. But they were counting without Captain Meigs, the *deus ex machina* of the enterprise, who intended to go with the expedition himself, and had other ideas as to its organization. No orders had yet been given for the troops and ordnance that were to be taken, and to arrange for this Meigs and Porter now went over to General Scott's headquarters. Here Porter was refused admission, and went home. The preparation of the orders for the army was thus accomplished without his assistance, and in fact he never knew their contents until after his arrival at Pensacola.

These orders, which were not signed by the adjutant-general, but by General Scott himself, and which were drawn by Meigs with the assistance of Colonel Keyes, Scott's secretary, specified the detachments of infantry, artillery, and engineers which were to compose the relief

force. They were addressed to Colonel Harvey Brown, an old officer with a long record of active service, who was assigned to the command, for which, as it turned out, he was entirely unfitted. But while Porter's order only gave him command of the Powhatan, Brown's order designated him "to take command of the expedition," which was a vital distinction. All the posts in Florida were likewise placed under Brown's command. This was all the more singular because, after the troops were once landed at Pickens, all further operations would be exclusively naval in character. The order was signed that night by General Scott, and an indorsement put upon it the next day: "April 2, 1861, Approved: Abraham Lincoln." It was thus the President's order, and if it conflicted with the orders to Porter, it superseded them by virtue of its later date. But to make sure of the entire subordination of the naval arm, the following note was appended:

All officers of the army and navy to whom this order may be exhibited will aid by every means in their power the expedition under the command of Col. Harvey Brown, supplying him with men and material, and cooperating with him as he may desire.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

The expedition was thus an army expedition with an auxiliary naval force; not a naval expedition with an auxiliary military force. It was not even a joint naval and military expedition, with power of independent co-operation to the officers respectively in command of the two branches, as is the usual arrangement. Captain Meigs, who evidently did not take Porter fully into his confidence, had no idea of leaving this point in doubt. If the orders to Porter were somewhat novel, the orders

to Brown were certainly unheard of. They substantially placed not only the Powhatan, but all other naval vessels with which Colonel Brown might come in contact, under his absolute control. The full power thus given was used by Brown repeatedly, as we shall see, and received the broadest construction of which its language was capable. Although it referred solely to the "expedition," it was appealed to even as late as the 25th of May, long after Brown had taken command of the fort and the "expedition," as such, was over.

Porter's preparations for his journey were already made, and he left home for New York on the night of the conference, as he had originally intended, but not with California as his final destination. The few minutes that he had passed with the President and the Secretary of State had wrought momentous changes in his mind, and were destined to result in still more momentous changes in his future career. The projects which he had been forming for six months vanished like smoke into thin air. Though up to that moment he had known it not, he stood once more in the presence of war. His vision had suddenly been cleared. It was to be a war stupendous and terrible—a war to the death. In such conditions there was but one place for him—in the forefront of the battle. And a strange destiny had brought him at the outset directly under the eye of the President, charged him with delivering what perhaps might be the first blow, given him an opportunity that might otherwise not have come to him in years—the command of a ship which officers of far higher rank would be glad to have, with an independent duty where all would depend upon his own courage and discretion. He fully resolved that he would not only relieve the fort, but recover Pensacola.

The next morning, when Porter reported at the navy-yard to Captain Foote, who was in command in the absence of the commandant, and gave that officer his batch of confidential orders, Foote was sorely perplexed, as well he might be. He was disturbed by the instruction that he was to fit out the Powhatan without delay, that Lieutenant Porter was to relieve Captain Mercer, and that the commandant was under no circumstances to communicate with the Navy Department on the subject. He was still more confused by the fact that on the very day that the President's order was signed he had received Secretary Welles's two telegrams to fit the Powhatan for sea, apparently sent in ignorance of the President's order. Nevertheless, Porter persuaded him that the specific injunction of the President to remain silent must be obeyed, and Foote obeyed it. Oddly enough, although the President and the Secretary were working at cross-purposes, their orders, as far as the commandant of the yard was concerned, were identical up to the point when all was ready for the Powhatan's departure. In fact, it would not have been possible to have executed the President's order without the knowledge of the Navy Department had it not happened by this curious chance that the Secretary, for independent purposes, was taking precisely the necessary steps to carry the President's order into effect. The Powhatan could not have sailed without her officers, and the recall of the officers from leave could only be effected by the Secretary. So with many other details. This novel game of hide and seek continued through the five days of the preparation, during which Porter was a guest at Foote's house at the navy-yard. Foote regularly reported to the Navy Department the progress of the ship in obedience to the department's order, and the Navy Department saw to the

recall of the officers who could not be reached by Foote, and gave other necessary orders, all in ignorance of the fact that Foote had an independent order from superior authority on the same subject. Porter was not, however, informed as to the telegrams from the department. Foote was all this time keeping a suspicious eye on Porter, and Porter was keeping a very suspicious eye on Foote, lest the latter should be tempted to make some official revelations. In fact, Foote did on two occasions refer to the secret expedition. In a letter to the Secretary of April 4th he said: "Captain Meigs has called on me with a letter showing his authority from the Government to have certain preparations made and things placed on board of vessels soon to go to sea about which you are familiar; but as the orders do not come direct, I make this report; but as no time is to be lost, I am preparing what is called for and report my action."

This rather obscure intimation appears not to have attracted any attention at the Navy Department. On the 5th, Foote telegraphed to the Secretary: "I am executing orders received from the Government through the navy officer as well as through the army officer. Will write fully, if possible, to-day; certainly to-morrow. I hope the Powhatan will sail this evening." This still more enigmatical telegram was not calculated to open the eyes of the department. It shows how great was the perplexity of Foote, a highly conscientious officer, when called upon to be instrumental in such irregular proceedings, and it was the result of an evident compromise in his mind between obedience to the order of the President and respect for the authority and regulations of the department.

Possibly the Secretary's suspicions may have been aroused by Foote's despatch. At any rate, it was upon

the evening of that day that Foote received the Secretary's telegram, "Delay the Powhatan for further instructions."

On the morning of the 6th the Powhatan was ready for sea, and on that morning Mercer received the department's detailed orders for the Fort Sumter expedition. The suspicion that Foote had previously entertained, but which was negatived by the similarity of the instructions from both sources, that the President intended to do one thing through Porter and the Secretary another thing through Mercer, now became a certainty, and Foote, who, with his long experience in the service, had never heard of such a thing as an order from the President except through the head of the Navy Department—as indeed nobody else had—was strongly inclined to take the obvious course for a commanding officer in doubt, and refer the matter to the department. But here he was stopped by the precise prohibition of the President. He therefore did the only thing possible under the circumstances—namely, wash his hands of the whole business, and leave Porter and Mercer to settle it between them. The result of their conference, which was reached with the assistance of Captain Meigs, was that Mercer should take the Powhatan out from the navy-yard with Porter on board, and that, when the ship reached the lower bay, he should turn over the command to Porter and be put ashore, Foote in the meantime promising himself that he would not lose a moment in notifying the authorities of the ship's departure. This program was carried out.

By this time, however, it was learned by the Navy Department that something unusual was taking place, and inquiries were set on foot which finally disclosed all the incidents leading up to the Fort Pickens expedition.



Mr. Welles laid the matter before the President, no doubt with an indignant protest, for he never could afterward allude to the subject without indignation. As a result of the conference that took place between the President, Seward, and Welles, the President directed Seward to give up the Powhatan as a part of the Fort Pickens expedition. But neither the President nor Welles nor Seward reflected at the moment that, as the President had given the original order, no less an authority than the President could revoke it, and the telegram was actually sent in the following terms: "Give the Powhatan up to Captain Mercer.—Seward."

The Powhatan had sailed at half past two in the afternoon. At three o'clock Foote received Seward's despatch. He immediately sent Lieutenant Roe to New York with orders to get the fastest tug he could find and chase the Powhatan and deliver the order to Porter.

In the meantime the Powhatan under Mercer's command, with Porter in his cabin, where he had locked himself in, was steaming down the bay. Meeting with many obstacles in the East River, and not having steam fairly up when she started, the ship was a long time in reaching Staten Island. Another hour was consumed in landing Captain Mercer and getting the boat back to the ship. The understanding was that Porter should remain in the cabin until the ship had crossed the bar and the pilot had left her, the first lieutenant, Perry, who did not know that Porter was on board, assuming temporary command. Just after Mercer's boat was hoisted up and the order given to go ahead, the quartermaster reported that a steamer was chasing and signaling the Powhatan. Perry thereupon stopped the Powhatan, and Roe came on board with the telegram. Perry walked into the cabin,

where, to his surprise, he found Porter and handed him the despatch.

The action which Porter now took was as characteristic as anything in his whole life. Being sure of the technical ground on which he stood, and it being his intention to carry out, and carry out successfully, the plan for the relief of Fort Pickens, he did not hesitate a moment, but telegraphed back the following reply: "Hon. William H. Seward, Secretary of State: I received my orders from the President and shall proceed and execute them.—D. D. Porter." This telegram he gave to Roe, with a letter to Foote, the tug was cast off, and Porter went on deck and gave orders to go ahead fast.

Whether Porter discerned what had happened in Washington can only be conjectured. Had the order been signed by the President, Porter would of course have obeyed it instantly. But he had no relation of subordination to the Secretary of State, and, in fact, no disciplinary relation whatever. To the message as it came to him his answer was technically correct, for, as a matter of naval law, it no more controlled his actions than a piece of waste paper. But in consideration of all the circumstances, it was assuming a grave responsibility to give the answer, to give it as he did on the spur of the moment, and then in disregard of the message to proceed immediately to sea.

The steamer *Atlantic* had been chartered for the military part of the expedition, and sailed independently of the *Powhatan*. Captain Meigs also received a telegram from Seward. But Meigs was in no such difficulty as Porter, for Brown's orders had come to him through his direct military superior, the commanding general of the army. He therefore had the War Department behind

him, whereas with the Navy Department Porter would have to count on a day of reckoning. As far as is known, Meigs made no immediate reply to Seward's despatch, and Colonel Brown and the Atlantic proceeded on their way. But in a letter to Mr. Seward written at sea by way of explanation, he philosophically remarked: "When the arrow has sped from the bow it may glance aside; but who shall reclaim it before its flight is finished?"

In ordinary times Porter certainly should, and probably would, have delayed his departure, in view of the conflicting orders he had received, and waited for further telegraphic instructions from the President. But the circumstances were exceptional. In the preceding Cabinet more than one of the members had been avowed secessionists. Others had been half-hearted in the cause of the Union. Even the members of the new Cabinet were at this time greatly in doubt as to whether the Southern States should be coerced. Mr. Seward had given no order in connection with the expedition, although he had inspired it. Porter had never dreamed of taking part in the expedition under original orders from Seward. His orders were signed by the President, and, though Seward's name was put to them as recommended, this was obviously done at the President's instance in order that he might more easily make his peace with the Secretary of the Navy. The latter had been ignored entirely by the President. It was quite possible that Mr. Seward, who had already shown his disposition to interfere with matters not within his province in the inception of the expedition, might be further arrogating to himself powers which he did not possess in attempting to countermand the original order. The delay of the Powhatan would have resulted in the disclosure of the whole plan and in

the sailing of the Atlantic without her convoy. The conclusion which Porter reached was that while considerations of his own well-being with the Navy Department, as well as the Department of State, would lead him to wait, every consideration of military success led him to go. While his acts in his involuntary rôle of an independent instrument of the President had aroused the hostility of Mr. Welles, his message of refusal would probably arouse that of Mr. Seward. As it turned out, however, his promptness and decision won the confidence of the President, and Mr. Welles's resentment remained latent until long after the war; while Seward thereafter wisely refrained from attempting the conduct of naval operations.

Porter's letter to Foote, which was sent back by the tug with the telegram to Seward, states plainly and forcibly his reasons for his conduct. He writes:

AT SEA, *April 6, 1861.*

DEAR CAPTAIN:

The telegram you sent me afforded me no comfort; on the contrary, burdened me. Still, the President says nothing, and I must obey his orders; they are too explicit to be misunderstood. I got them from his own hand. He has not recalled them. Meigs is off and ahead of me. I could not go with him, and I recollect that all Meigs's guns were on board. This is an unpleasant position to be in, but I will work out of it. Am sustained by my sense of duty, and will leave the rest to that kind Providence which has never deserted me in very trying circumstances. Will you please forward the enclosed despatch to the Secretary of State?

Truly and sincerely yours,

D. D. PORTER.

On the 16th the Atlantic arrived off Pensacola with Brown and Meigs on board. Slemmer's little garrison

of forty men had been reenforced four days before by Vogdes with his company of eighty, and by one hundred marines. The detachment from the Atlantic was landed, partly on the night of her arrival and partly the next morning. A second detachment was landed from the Illinois, another chartered steamer, which arrived on the 19th. The garrison now consisted of one thousand men, and the safety of the fort was assured. The stores and ammunition were also rapidly put ashore, and on the 25th the Atlantic left Pensacola.

Porter's orders from the President were peremptory, and required him to "establish himself within the harbor." Unless his ship could enter unobserved, the order was substantially to engage the Confederate forts on the mainland, McRee and Barrancas, which directly covered the harbor entrance. It left no room for discretion. The Powhatan arrived on the morning of the 17th. It was Porter's intention to proceed at once inside. He counted largely on surprise. With this object he disguised his ship before approaching the roadstead and was standing directly in to the harbor. The Atlantic was anchored nearer the shore outside Santa Rosa, and near her was the Wyandotte with Captain Meigs on board. But Colonel Brown was now in command, and a naval attack, or any other attack for that matter, was no part of his program, and Meigs was ready to cooperate with him to prevent it. Signals were accordingly made to Porter to stop, to which he paid no attention, and thereupon, at the request of Meigs, the Wyandotte put herself directly in the path of the Powhatan, and Porter was compelled to desist.

Knowing Porter's intention when the Powhatan came in sight, Brown had written a note to Meigs in which he said:

From the wretched condition of the defense of this place [Pickens] and the very elaborate range of batteries put up on the opposite side, it is desirable that we put off the day of collision as long as possible. If Porter runs the gantlet now, a collision is inevitable and we shall suffer the most. I, too, doubt the possibility of his escaping. I am told Fort McRee alone mounts one hundred guns. Would it not, then, be best to stop him? I think so.

Armed with this letter, Meigs came on board the Powhatan, and there wrote an official letter to Porter, enclosing that of Brown. His letter said:

Under the circumstances detailed in the within letter and the necessity of avoiding collision while in the act of landing stores, horses, and artillery, I feel it my duty to request you to postpone entering the harbor for the present.

My connection with the expedition and my knowledge of the views and intentions of the President justify me in making this request with almost the force of an order from the President.

The buoys are, I am glad to find, still in place, and a few nights hence I think you will be able, by sending lights to these buoys, to enter undiscovered.

The result of the interview Meigs reported to Brown on the following day: "It was only by exhibiting your letter to him [Porter] and indorsing most thoroughly my agreement with it and giving him a copy of the General Orders just published to all officers to cooperate as you desired that I stopped this gallant officer bent on a desperate deed of self-sacrifice and devotion to his country. He will wait your orders, as I shall, in all obedience and fealty."

Colonel Brown's authority under the orders of the President could not be disputed, and Porter, who had a perfect sense of military subordination, instantly ac-

quiesced. He could refuse point blank to obey the Secretary of State, but he recognized without question the authority of the officer whom the President had seen fit to constitute for the time being his military superior. He expressed his feelings by saying: "I felt like running over Meigs's tug, but obeyed the order." It is clear from Meigs's letters that he only intended to stay Porter's hand for the moment, until Fort Pickens should be better prepared. Meigs was not in the least worried by any fables about the Confederate defenses. But in a few days he went back to Washington and lost touch of the situation.

Porter wrote Brown the next day, observing that his own orders were peremptory, but that Brown's letter requesting him not to go in until Fort Pickens was in a state of defense was quite sufficient to postpone the movement. But he urged the necessity of immediate action. He said:

If you think that in two days' time you will be ready for me to make the attempt, please notify me, for after that time I shall have to run the gantlet by moonlight, which would no doubt be a good time for an exhibition, but darkness would suit better for a piece of strategy. I know that I am here to give you aid and comfort, and keep any of the enemy from crossing over in boats on the inside; but, while I will do all I can in the way of aid, I can not do much in cutting off boats where I now am. Will you please make such suggestions as your good sense may dictate, and I will endeavor to follow them as near as I can.

To this Colonel Brown replied on the 19th: "I know that in a week I can not get ready to warrant a voluntary provoking of hostilities, and how much longer I can not tell; but in two days I can be in but little better condition than I now am, and I can only repeat that if you do enter before I am prepared, in my judg-



ment the movement will be unwise and deeply injurious to the best interests of the country.”<sup>1</sup>

It will hardly be believed that this same Colonel Brown on the very day before had reported to Colonel Keyes, General Scott's secretary: “In two days I think I shall be able to make a respectable defense against the combined force of the forts and batteries, and to inflict more injury than I shall receive.”<sup>2</sup> Such was Brown's official statement on the 18th of April, and it was undoubtedly the truth.

The time for the movement which the President had ordered did not arrive, according to the ideas of Colonel Brown, in two days, or in a week. In fact, it never arrived. Nor had Colonel Brown from the beginning intended that it should. On the very day after his arrival, the 17th of April, Brown had written to the Confederate commander, General Bragg, a perfectly gratuitous letter, by which he had debarred not only himself but the naval forces from attacking the enemy. He said:

I have the honor to inform you that I have arrived at this post, and that I shall, unless assailed, act only on the defensive, and make only such disposition of my forces as is necessary to protect them from any enemy, foreign or domestic. I have also to inform you that no movement of the troops of my command or of United States vessels in this vicinity will have any other than a defensive object, unless we shall unhappily be compelled to act offensively, repelling aggressions against the flag, persons, or property of our country.

It is extraordinary, in view of these three letters, that the officer who wrote them was not court-martialed and

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, Navy, iv, 124.    <sup>2</sup> War Records, Army, i, 379.

at the least dismissed the service. It only shows how lax was the discipline of the army at this time. No notice was taken of Brown's conduct, and he was even brevetted. There was absolutely no excuse for him. Porter had a positive order from the President. Fort Pickens, on its island, with a garrison of a thousand men, and with the Powhatan and the Brooklyn commanding the approaches both afloat and ashore, was as safe from assault as if it had been in the harbor of New York. To have attempted the landing of a Confederate force on Santa Rosa Island after the reenforcement would have been madness, as General Bragg was well aware.<sup>1</sup> Nor was he in any condition to repel a naval attack. The defective structure alone of Fort McRee rendered it incapable of efficient defense.<sup>2</sup> On the 6th of April Bragg reported to the Secretary of War that his batteries were not ready, and he was entirely deficient in ammunition. In another communication he says: "I am not prepared with my batteries for anything more than a feeble defense, and that condition can not be changed until I get supplies." On the 9th he writes: "Will do our best, but supplies are short for a continued resistance." This continues to be the burden of his despatches for three weeks. Supplies, ordnance, subsistence, transportation, artillerists—all are wanting. Even on the 9th of May, over three weeks after Porter's arrival, he reports that his supply of musket cartridges "would last me in an engagement about thirty minutes"; and he adds: "Our best defense against the fleet—shells—can not be used for

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<sup>1</sup> Even as late as May 9 Bragg was endeavoring to obstruct the channel between McRee and Pickens, and reported that "the entrance of steamers would entirely frustrate our movement on the island, if it did not result in the capture of our force."

<sup>2</sup> See Bragg's report, War Records, Army, vi, 490.

want of fuses. Not one has yet reached me." And all this time not a gun had been fired from the Confederate works, although the supply and reconstruction and armament and reenforcement of Fort Pickens had been going on in broad daylight just across the entrance to the harbor—and not a gun was fired for months afterward. Well might Porter say with bitterness in the following summer: "I know that the great disappointment of my life was not being permitted to enter the harbor of Pensacola when my plans were so well laid that I was certain of success."

The naval force which Porter virtually controlled under the presidential order included the Powhatan and the Brooklyn, each carrying an armament of twenty or more 9-inch guns, the Powhatan having in addition an 11-inch pivot and the Brooklyn an 80-pounder rifle. There were also two small steamers, the Wyandotte and Crusader. The frigate Sabine and the sloop of war St. Louis, although as sailing ships they could hardly have cooperated with much effect in the direct attack, gave a certain additional element of strength to the situation of the attacking force, where the enemy had not a gun afloat. With a combined and determined attack of the powerful batteries of the Powhatan, the Brooklyn, and Fort Pickens, the Confederate defenses, as they existed at the end of April, would probably have been overcome, and the harbor of Pensacola recovered. At any rate, there was a fighting chance, which was all that Porter needed. Even had the risk been greater, the enterprise was well worth it, for although unprepared for actual conflict, the Confederate posts still contained the captured ordnance, machinery, and naval and military stores and munitions of war, of incalculable value to the enemy, as was afterward shown, the mere destruction of which would have

immeasurably crippled his fighting resources during the next two years. Colonel Brown, who could see nothing but Fort Pickens, told Captain Adams in so many words that "if the navy will keep the island free from the enemy, it will fulfil all the duties of a belligerent nature that I desire now," and so little did he understand the strategic conditions that he actually suggested that the Brooklyn's guns, or a part of them, should be landed and placed in battery near his fort. "I am told," he naively says, "that the Brooklyn has an abundance of 9-inch shell-guns"—as if she carried them for ballast.

Captain Adams, the senior naval officer, who resembled in some ways the helpless old sailing frigate he commanded, had as little perception as Colonel Brown of the demands of the situation. It never entered his head that he or his force was to be put to any use unless he had a specific order. It was a source of evident relief to him to have Brown at his side to give him directions under the President's authority. In a gossipy letter to Du Pont he alludes thus to Porter's undertaking: "The Powhatan came here a few days ago on a secret and desperate expedition. Fortunately, I think, he did not undertake it, and I have therefore added the Powhatan to my squadron, and find her very useful, as she is fully officered." It is difficult to say what his idea was of the usefulness of a ship of war; but some notion may be gathered of it from his first order to Porter on the employment of his vessel: "If it is possible to keep the Powhatan in readiness to move at the shortest notice, I wish you to do so. I am expecting every day an attack will be made on Fort Pickens, in which case her services will be necessary to tow this ship (the Sabine) into a position where she can give most assistance to the fort and most annoyance to the enemy. When the firing from the

mainland begins, you will please run down to this ship immediately for this purpose."

Captain Adams's order, while showing a commendable desire to have a hand in the expected battle, does not reflect credit on his strategic perception. He proposed that at the critical moment the Powhatan, which, with the Brooklyn, constituted the real strength of his force for attack, should be converted into a tender, to tow the frigate into action. The spectacle of Porter, after the enemy actually opened fire, running down to the Sabine in order that Adams might contribute his useless presence to the engagement was fortunately not destined to be witnessed. The enemy never opened fire, and Adams did all that he could to avoid giving him any provocation for so doing. His plan, as he told the Secretary, was "to exercise constant activity, vigilance, and forbearance"—a truly original plan for an officer in the face of the enemy. Even as late as the 6th of June he wrote to Du Pont, "Fort Pickens is still safe, and our heavy work and vigilance still continue." And it remained nothing but "heavy work and vigilance" to the end. As Porter said, with the sardonic humor that was so characteristic of him, "There was a fascination about Pensacola Bar that kept the commanding officers there day after day gazing at the harbor, and fancying, perhaps, that they were acquiring experience in the art of war."

In after-years Porter did not hesitate to give expression to his scorn of these humiliating proceedings. He said in one of his later books:

After Fort Pickens was fully manned, the Union squadron hauled in closer and looked placidly on, while the people of Mobile were supplying the rebel army with everything they wanted by means of tugs and schooners. At first the Confederates were cautious how they sent in supplies; but,

finding that they were not molested or even questioned, they began to send them openly by sea in large quantities. Vessels loaded with lumber departed daily from Pensacola harbor, and others entered, but not a boat was sent from the flagship to inquire what were the cargoes and for whom intended. I went on board the senior naval officer's ship several times to try and get an explanation of this very peculiar method of carrying on war, but the only satisfaction I received was the information that the commanding officer's orders were to "commit no overt act." These orders were the last communication received from the department some thirty days previous. I asked the senior officer to let me take the responsibility of blockading the port of Pensacola, but he objected to my doing so. There was in all this business an inanity of which I had never conceived. The commanding officer of Fort Pickens had no orders at all that I am aware of, except to hold the fort, and not draw the fire of the Confederates.

One day the commander of the squadron signaled me to meet him at the fort for a conference, and I at once repaired there. The Confederates had hauled the dry dock out of the basin at the navy-yard and anchored it about two hundred yards from Fort Pickens. There were a number of men on the dock, and four heavy anchors were hanging from its ends. When I reached the fort the senior naval officer was there in consultation with the commanding officer of the troops. They had written to Bragg to ask what were his intentions with regard to the dry dock. Bragg replied that the dock had got adrift and that he would restore it to its place. About four hours afterward it *accidentally* sunk in the middle of the channel! Of course, nobody believed that this was really an accident, but our senior officers thought they had done their duty by inquiring of Bragg what he intended to do, and, after having seen him carry out his intentions, they sat down quietly to dinner. Colonel Brown filled up some more sand-bags and Bragg mounted an extra gun; they were like two boys

daring each other to knock off chips from their shoulders and playing a farce of war.<sup>1</sup>

For nearly six weeks Porter remained at Pensacola, engaged in reconnaissances, landing men and stores at Fort Pickens, and in guard and blockade duty. During the greater part of the time the *opera bouffe* warfare continued. All prospect of recovering Pensacola had vanished. Porter had informed Mr. Seward of the circumstances that prevented the execution of the President's order, enclosing copies of the letters of Brown and Meigs, and asked that they be laid before the President. They were finally filed in the Navy Department. The singular conclusion of this singular episode is to be found in a letter of the President of May 11th to the Secretary of the Navy, which says:

Lieutenant D. D. Porter was placed in command of the Powhatan, and Captain Samuel Mercer was detached therefrom by my special order, and neither of them is responsible for any apparent or real irregularity on their part in connection with that vessel.

Hereafter Captain Porter is relieved from that special service and placed under the direction of the Navy Department, from which he will receive instructions and to which he will report.

On the 19th of April the President issued his proclamation of blockade. On the 12th of May Adams received it at Pensacola, and the formal blockade was set on foot the next day at that point. Other ships were sent down to make the blockade effective at the Gulf ports, and on the 25th Captain McKean came in the Niagara to assume command. On the 26th the Powhatan was

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<sup>1</sup> The correspondence, which fully justifies Porter's comments, is in War Records, Army, i, 417-420.



sent to Mobile to institute the blockade at that port, and on the 30th she was relieved by another ship and ordered to perform the same duty off the Southwest Pass of the Mississippi.

After twenty years of service as a lieutenant, Porter now obtained his promotion to commander, his commission dating April 22, 1861. For the two months following his arrival off the mouth of the Mississippi, on May 30th, he continued the blockade of the Southwest Pass, the Brooklyn performing the same duty at Pass à l'Outre. On the day of his arrival he captured his first prize, the schooner Mary Clinton. The blockade was perhaps legally effective at the points named, but it was far from being a blockade of the coast. The South and Northeast Passes of the Mississippi were open to small vessels and privateers, and numerous other points from Mobile to the Atchafalaya were available for the receipt of supplies in small coasters. The efficiency of the Powhatan was very much diminished, owing to the condition of her boilers and her reduced coal supply, and, as Porter wrote to the department on the 1st of June, she would "soon only be able to lie at the bar like a sailing ship, without the ability of a sailing ship to maneuver under sail." He called the attention of the department most urgently to the necessity of having plenty of colliers at the blockading stations and of increasing the efficiency of the blockade by a number of small steamers. It was during this period, while blockading New Orleans, that Porter became deeply impressed with the vital importance of aggressive operations by the navy in the lower Mississippi, and developed the plan which was carried out later of passing the forts and seizing New Orleans. To his mind, the conquest of the lower Mississippi was the most important operation that the navy

could undertake, and he dwelt upon its urgency, even making it the subject of official recommendation.

The Powhatan continued on her station on the blockade until the 13th of August. Late in the previous June the first of the Confederate commerce destroyers, the *Sumter*, ran out through Pass à l'Outre under the command of Semmes, and owing to the Brooklyn's want of speed, made her escape. During the following month the *Sumter* made havoc with American commerce in the West Indies, and several ships were sent in search of her, but without success. On the 13th of August Porter recaptured the American schooner *Abby Bradford*, which had been made a prize a short time before by the *Sumter*, and which was attempting to run the blockade and reach New Orleans. From the papers found on board he learned that the *Sumter* was at Puerto Cabello, short of coal. Porter had by this time had enough of blockade duty and saw an opportunity to get out of it. He reported the capture to the Secretary, and stated in his letter, "I sail to-night to Pensacola to report the circumstances to the flag-officer, and hope to induce him to let me go in search of the *Sumter*." On the 14th he reported to Flag-Officer Mervine, commanding the Gulf squadron, and received the necessary order. He left Pensacola the same night.

Porter was now in his element. The question before him was first to find out where the *Sumter* was, and then to divine where she would go next. In his remarkable chase Porter showed an alertness in gathering and following up his information that was only equaled by his acuteness in reasoning out Semmes's projected movements. For this latter purpose he brought into play a faculty of strategic imagination that enabled him to foresee every move on the board. He was heavily handi-

capped by the Powhatan, a clumsy ship for the service, with worn-out machinery, and a great coal burner—her consumption being five times that of the Sumter for the same speed—and the supply must come from neutral ports. But these considerations did not deter him.

In the course of his cruise Porter seized every opportunity to advise the department of the measures that should be taken to capture the Sumter. As her first cruising ground would be the Caribbean Sea, he urged "that two swift steamers be kept cruising off Cape San Antonio in sight of each other; that one steamer be sent to the Mona Passage, and another between Cuba and Haiti, one to cruise along the south side of Cuba, two to go down on the Spanish Main, visiting all places where coal is to be found, and one to cruise from St. Thomas through the islands." His plan was to give the vessels certain beats which they were to patrol, and he was confident that the Sumter, if so looked for, must inevitably be taken.

Porter started from Pensacola on his chase on the 14th of August. His work would have been comparatively easy if telegraph-cables had then been in existence. In fact, the successful cruises of the Alabama, the Florida, and the Sumter would have been impossible under those conditions. But all the information he could get was several days old; and by the time that news reached him of the Sumter's whereabouts she had left the reported neighborhood, and had gone no one knew whither.

The Powhatan headed first for Cape San Antonio, where she arrived on the 17th of August. Here she spoke several American vessels, but could obtain no word of the Sumter. Thence she coasted along to the eastward of the Isle of Pines, where she learned from an

American brig that the Maxwell, a prize to the Sumter, had arrived at Cienfuegos, and that the Spanish authorities had taken possession of her. Porter instantly made for Cienfuegos, but he found that the Maxwell had been captured off Puerto Cabello nearly a month before, and the information of Semmes's movements was too old to be of any use. In fact, the capture of the Maxwell took place only two days after that of the Abby Bradford, the news of which had first led Porter to leave the Mississippi blockade. So he continued along the coast of Cuba to Cay Breton, and learning nothing further, determined to run down to Jamaica for coal and information. Here he arrived on the 21st.

Sifting the rumors that were flying about at Jamaica, Porter pushed on to Curaçao, where he arrived on the 29th. The Sumter had been there a month before and had been well received by the governor and allowed to coal. This led to an argumentative correspondence, in which Porter protested strenuously and with dignity against the action of the governor, contending, in accordance with the claim officially made by the Government that the Sumter was not a ship of war, but a privateer and an insurgent, and as such should be denied the privileges of the port. The discussion was suddenly terminated by news that the Sumter had been sighted from Margarita on the 5th of August, and Porter immediately pressed on to St. Thomas, where further information would probably be obtained.

The Powhatan arrived at St. Thomas on the 4th of September, and two days later learned from a Berbice schooner that on the day of the Powhatan's arrival the Sumter had been at Surinam. Porter instantly put to sea, heading for the coast of Guiana. On his way he touched at Martinique and Barbados for news, only stop-

ping long enough to communicate with the consul at the latter island, not even anchoring, but keeping all the while under steam. Learning here that the Sumter had coaled at Surinam on August 31st, he left at once, and for the purpose of determining the vital question whether she had gone to the east or the west, he made a dash for the light-ship off Demerara.

At the light-ship Porter learned that the Sumter had not passed to the westward, a movement that would have given him greatly the advantage, but that there were rumors of her having gone to Cayenne. Losing no time, he turned his course eastward, and later in the day made the Surinam light-ship. Here he discovered from the pilots that Semmes, after being refused admission to Cayenne and returning to Surinam, had given out that the Sumter was going northwest to Jamaica and would shortly return. From this and other indications, Porter with his unerring insight concluded that Semmes would take the opposite direction, to the southeast along the Brazilian coast. His judgment proved to be exactly correct, and for the first time he was now fairly on the track of his game.

With perfect confidence in the certainty of his conclusions and in the final outcome, Porter now steamed for Maranhão, in Brazil. But he counted without his ship. On the very next day after leaving Surinam one of her boilers broke down. As the sea was smooth, he would not stop to repair it, but pressed on with all the power of which his crippled vessel was capable. Arriving at Maranhão on the 21st, he learned, to his infinite disappointment, that the Sumter had left there only five days before. Within three days of his arrival she had been cruising before the port in the hope of capturing a New York brig whose coming was expect-

ed, and which actually entered the port with the Powhatan.

Porter was much incensed at the courtesies that had been heaped upon Semmes by the governor of Maranhão, who had shown strong sympathy with the cause of secession. "Under these circumstances," he said, "I did not deem it incumbent on me to observe any particular etiquette toward the Government beyond firing the usual salute, and I requested the consul to make the governor understand that I did not feel myself called upon to pay a visit of ceremony to a Government which had so failed in its treaty obligations to the United States." These reminders Porter followed up with a spirited protest against the conduct of the governor in permitting Semmes to coal. At the same time Porter was exhausting every source of information that would furnish a clue to Semmes's plans. Inquiries were made of every steamer and small coaster that put in to Maranhão; the casual remarks dropped by the Sumter's officers a week before were carefully weighed; and the pilot who had taken Semmes out of the harbor was questioned. From all these Porter formed the conclusion that the Sumter had gone neither to the westward, nor to Jamaica, nor to the Windward Islands, nor eastward to Cape San Roque, any one of which might have presented inducements as an inviting cruising ground; but that she had taken a northeasterly course to a point where she could lie in the track of vessels bound home from Brazil, the East Indies, and the Pacific.

Having reached this conclusion, Porter left Maranhão, and started for the suspected neighborhood with the same buoyant confidence in the correctness of his judgment that he had felt in leaving Surinam; and this time also he was right. The Powhatan was there, and

the Sumter was there. But they did not sight each other. Nor did Porter fall in with any vessels that had spoken the Sumter. In fact, this period of the Sumter's cruise was dull and profitless. During the entire month from September 25th to October 24th Semmes got sight of only one vessel, an English brig, the Spartan, from Halifax, on October 5th. Porter cruised about, also to no purpose, in the track of homeward-bound South American commerce until the 10th of October, when he put in to St. Thomas. Here he found the Spartan, and discovered from a comparison of logs that on the day when she spoke the Sumter the Powhatan was only seventy-five miles away. Such are the chances of pursuit in the open sea.

The time had now arrived for Porter to return home. His ship was in a condition that made a complete overhauling imperative, and until this could be done she was totally unfit for further service. Accordingly he left St. Thomas and headed directly for New York, where he arrived on the 9th of November, seven months after he had sailed from the same port under the orders of the President.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE NEW ORLEANS EXPEDITION

PORTER'S arrival at New York in the Powhatan on Saturday, the 9th of November, 1861, happened two days after the battle of Port Royal, and he reported at Washington on the 12th, on which day the first news of the victory reached the Navy Department.

During the seven months that had elapsed since his departure, at the very moment when the war actually began, all that the Navy Department had accomplished was the setting on foot of an imperfect, though extensive, blockade and the capture of the forts at Hatteras Inlet, and those at Port Royal, the last only a few days before. As we look back at the history of this period, it seems incredible that the Government, with the vast resources at its command, opposing an enemy absolutely destitute of a naval force, whose enormous coast-line rendered him in the highest degree vulnerable to naval attack, should have been able to show only such meager results during seven months of war. Lest this statement should be thought too severe, we quote the candid admission of Secretary Welles: "Indeed, but for some redeeming successes at Hatteras and Port Royal preceding the meeting of Congress in December, the whole belligerent operations would have been pronounced weak and imbecile failures."<sup>1</sup> Of course this was partly due to general

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<sup>1</sup> G. Welles, in the *Galaxy*, February, 1871, vol. xxiii, p. 149.

absence of preparation for war, partly to the defective character of the fleet, which had only been half converted from sailing vessels into steamers, partly to the inefficient personnel in the upper grades of the navy, and partly to the failure of the War Department to furnish troops to hold the captured points. But it was mainly due to the extreme slowness and deliberation with which the Navy Department moved. Nothing shows this more clearly than the results accomplished in the same time by the Confederates with incomparably inferior resources—results which were only made possible by the delays and inactivity of the National Government. In this is to be found the true explanation of the fact that the first seven months of the war did not witness the opening of the Mississippi and the fall of every considerable Southern seaport before its fortifications had been rendered nearly impregnable. It is safe to say that the American people to-day would not tolerate for a week a naval administration which conducted the operations of war in the timorous, procrastinating, and inefficient fashion in which they were conducted in 1861.

The Navy Department during the Civil War had at its head two men, Welles and Fox, each of whom was remarkable in his way. The Secretary, Welles, of Connecticut, was a seasoned politician, who had been an ardent Jackson Democrat in his youth, but whose antislavery views carried him into the Republican party at its formation in 1856. He was familiar with public questions, and had all his life been in the thick of political controversy. Possessing a vigorous mind and considerable breadth of view, his influence upon public measures had been extensive and wholesome. Long experience as a newspaper editor had supplied him with a rhetorical and somewhat caustic pen, and he was fond of using it. His knowledge

of public matters and his rugged and forceful intellect gave him an important part in the discussions of general policy which weighed with such a fearful burden of responsibility upon the Lincoln Cabinet. But he lacked some qualities necessary for success in executive administration. Slow of decision himself, he was tolerant of slowness in his subordinates. Hence the machine which he controlled, in which rapidity of action was of the first importance, moved during the first year of the war with a deliberation that, in comparison with ordinary business methods of to-day, seems little less than appalling.

Fox, on the other hand, was preeminently an executive man, and, unlike Welles—though the latter had once held an office in the Navy Department—he was thoroughly familiar with the business in hand. After twenty years in the navy he had resigned and entered on a mercantile career. At the instance of the Postmaster-General, Montgomery Blair, who was his brother-in-law, he was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Had he been at the head of the department the history of the first year of the war would have been very different. He would probably have been of little aid in the deliberations of the Cabinet on questions of foreign and domestic policy, but in the work of the department he would have decided things in a day that slumbered with Welles for a week or a month. It was not in Mr. Welles's nature to allow a subordinate to be too much in the public eye, and it was not in Fox's nature, modest and retiring as he was, and schooled in the disciplinary attitude toward the head of the department, to take the reins in his own hands, even when he ran no risk of being charged with encroachment upon higher prerogatives. After the first year the Secretary, while maintaining before the country his external attributes as chief, really left to Fox the

management of belligerent operations, or at least did not obstruct him; and to Fox is due, in a large degree, the credit of the results achieved. In the autumn of 1861 these conditions had not yet been established, and the naval administration, still pursuing its deliberate course, stood greatly in need of some dynamic force capable of overcoming its inertia and setting its cumbersome machinery really in motion. This force it was now Porter's office to supply.

When Porter arrived in Washington his mind was full of a single idea, the capture of New Orleans and the opening of the Mississippi. As has been already noticed, his attention had been fixed upon it during the dreary weeks when he had lain inactive in the Powhatan blockading the mouth of the river. As early as the 4th of July, in a report to Flag-Officer Mervine, commanding the Gulf squadron, he wrote: "There is a field here for something to do. . . . I assure you that an expedition up the river is an easy thing for vessels not drawing over sixteen feet." Admiral John R. Bartlett, at that time a junior officer in the steamer Mississippi, touching at Southwest Pass, had occasion later in the same month of July to visit the Powhatan, and while walking up and down the quarter-deck with him Porter expressed forcibly his views on the subject. "He was very much exasperated," says Bartlett, "that the department at Washington delayed sending vessels of proper draft to enter the river, and said that if he had half a dozen good vessels he would undertake to run by the forts and capture New Orleans." Porter saw at a glance the tremendous results that such an expedition could accomplish. The entire river was as yet destitute of defenses of any kind, except the two forts, Jackson and St. Philip, at Plaquemine Bend, twenty-five miles above the Head of the

Passes, and seventy-five miles below the city. Porter's plan was simple. It only required half a dozen good vessels of suitable draft with which "to run by the forts and capture New Orleans." At that time it might have been done, for the forts were out of repair, and their armament was comparatively insignificant. Once in possession, a fleet, by gradual enlargement, might hold the river for all time and prevent the erection of other defenses.

Porter's clear professional insight saw not only the feasibility of the enterprise, but its overwhelming strategic importance. It was not merely the moral effect of the conquest of the greatest commercial seaport of the South; it was the stupendous strategic effect of opening a highway from the Gulf to the Ohio capable of easy defense by forces afloat, and cutting in halves the territory of the Confederates. The river separated the outlying States of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas from the rest of the Confederacy. These States were an inexhaustible base of supplies. Not only were they large producers of cotton, sugar, and grain, but Texas furnished most of the beef that was required for the Confederate army. Along the Rio Grande the Confederacy had its only foreign frontier, by which supplies from abroad were readily introduced. This no coast blockade could prevent. The supplies were brought to the Mississippi by way of its great western tributaries, above all by the Red River, which crossed the State of Louisiana. The capture and occupation of the Mississippi would cut them off. No more convincing evidence of the supremacy of the National Government could be given to the world than the visible division of the Confederacy and the acquisition of its commercial metropolis. Little had been done to create a river-defense fleet beyond the fit-

ting out of the ram *Manassas*. From his own observation and his intercourse with fishermen and pilots while on the blockade, Porter had learned much as to the condition of the fortifications and was convinced of their inability to bar a passage. As he had said to Bartlett in July, he would have been willing to attempt it if he had had a few good ships of light draft; and although on his arrival in Washington four months later the defenses had presumably been strengthened, he was more than ever persuaded that it was the most important operation that the department could undertake, and if properly managed would be sure of success.

In view of subsequent discussions, it is important to observe that Porter's plan looked to the *passage* of the forts by the fleet, not to their *reduction* by a naval attack beforehand. At that time the operation would have been attended with little risk from the forts. Nor was there any obstruction to the navigation of the river, either above or below the forts. Porter knew very well that New Orleans itself was defenseless under the guns of a naval force, and that when the forts were once isolated, lying as they did among swamps and bayous, and dependent on water communication, their ultimate fall was only a question of time. Hence the attacking force was to pass the forts without waiting for their reduction.

It is quite impossible at this day to understand the delays of the Navy Department in preparing a plan for such a campaign. Two months after the war broke out a board was appointed to consider the general subject of naval operations, but chiefly for the purpose of selecting the objective point of an attack on the Atlantic coast, the question being between Port Royal and Fernandina. New Orleans apparently received no consideration. Ac-



according to Mr. Welles: "In general and desultory conversation with military and naval men and others the passage of the forts and capture of New Orleans was spoken of as a desirable but not a practicable naval undertaking." The deliberations of the board on the Atlantic coast resulted four months later in the expedition to Port Royal and the capture of the forts at that point on the 7th of November, the news of which was received at the Navy Department on the 12th. Up to this latter date, which was the date of Porter's arrival, "the views of the department," says Mr. Welles, in reference to an expedition to New Orleans, were "speculative and uncertain." In short, up to this date, nothing whatever had been done or even really considered with a view to the conquest of the lower Mississippi, though the war had been in progress for seven months.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that Porter, on his arrival in Washington, and in the first burst of his pent-up ardor, should have captivated the administration by the force of his contagious enthusiasm and by his intelligent and well-digested plans, and should have secured within twenty-four hours after his arrival the adoption of his project.

The manner in which it came about was rather accidental, but that it would have come about in some way and within a very short time no one can doubt. While Porter was waiting in the anteroom of the Secretary of the Navy, immediately after his arrival, he fell into conversation with two of the great Republican Senators, Mr. Hale, of New Hampshire, and Mr. Grimes, of Iowa. He unfolded to them his plan for the capture of New Orleans, and so deeply did he arouse their interest that they insisted on taking him in to the Secretary and reinforcing his appeal. Although until that day Mr.



Welles's views on the subject were "speculative and uncertain," and he had regarded the undertaking as impracticable, he seems to have been readily persuaded of its importance, and he forthwith repaired with Porter and Assistant Secretary Fox to the White House to lay it before the President. Porter, as we have seen, was not unknown to Mr. Lincoln, to whom he repeated the outline of his plan. It comprised the fitting out of a fleet of ships of war, which should be fast steamers of not more than eighteen feet draft and carrying about two hundred and fifty guns; "also a flotilla of mortar-vessels to be used in case it should be necessary to bombard Forts Jackson and St. Philip before the fleet should attempt to pass them"; and a body of troops in transports to take possession of the city after it should have surrendered to the navy. The President grasped at once the full meaning of the proposal and was so profoundly impressed with its importance that he is reported to have said: "This should have been done sooner. The Mississippi is the key to the whole situation." However this may be, he arranged at the interview for a second meeting at the headquarters of General McClellan, who two weeks before had superseded Scott in command of the army, to discuss the subject, and especially to determine how soon the necessary troops could be obtained. For an hour before the meeting Mr. Welles had Fox and Porter in private consultation at his house. Thence they went to the headquarters of the army, where they met the President and General McClellan, and all five took part in the conference. After examining the situation, McClellan reported that he could furnish twenty thousand troops, and the President immediately directed the Secretary of the Navy to set on foot the expedition, the general preparation of which was entrusted

to Fox. General McClellan assigned General Barnard, of the engineers, to advise with the Navy Department in reference to the work of the army.

In the details of preparation Porter had a large share. The mortar-flotilla was to be created out of nothing, and the department left the supervision of this branch of the work entirely to him. He had to purchase and fit out twenty large schooners, each one mounting a heavy 13-inch mortar and two 32-pounders. Orders were given for the casting of the mortars at Pittsburg, for the manufacture of thirty thousand shell, and for the construction of the carriages in New York. On November 18 Porter was ordered on a brief visit to New York to start the preparations. Besides the mortar-boats, the flotilla included an auxiliary force of six steam-gunboats and a store-ship. Officers were selected from the merchant marine to command the mortar-schooners, and seven hundred picked men were enlisted for the crews. The preparations for the expedition and the creation of the mortar-flotilla gave Porter an absorbing occupation, but did not present any particular difficulties to his exacting energy. He knew how to make the machine go; and whether the work had to be got out of dilatory contractors or equally dilatory navy-yards, captains, or department officials, he got it out of them. His time was spent chiefly at Washington, with occasional hasty visits to New York and other points. By the time that the Hartford, which was assigned as the flag-ship of the expedition, started from Hampton Roads, early in February, all the mortar-schooners had sailed, or were on the point of sailing, and they arrived in the Mississippi a month before the squadron was ready to use them.

In the various conferences with the Secretary and with Fox that were incidental to the preparation of the

expedition much thought was given to the question of selecting a commander-in-chief. As the author of the enterprise, and as possessing in the highest degree the qualities necessary to make it a success, the obvious man for the place was Porter. Postmaster-General Blair, with whom Fox was living at the time, says that Porter was "regarded by Mr. Fox as the great commander, and the command would have been unhesitatingly given to him if his rank had admitted of it." But strangely enough, although Porter was forty-eight years old, his position on the navy list, that of a junior commander, made this selection impossible—at least, it so appeared to the Navy Department. It was therefore decided that Porter should command the mortar-flotilla, which was attached to the fleet, but as a separate division, with its own permanent organization. There was no other divisional organization in the fleet.<sup>1</sup> It thus happened that, although there were a dozen officers in the fleet senior to Porter in rank, each was the captain only of his own vessel, while Porter commanded a division of twenty-seven. So much did the conventional routine of the Navy Department concede to Porter's exceptional qualities. He was formally ordered to the command on the 2d of December.

For the chief command of the expedition Porter warmly advocated the selection of Farragut. At this time Farragut was sixty-one years old, but still vigorous and active. Of other captains of mark, Du Pont, Foote, and Davis were occupied elsewhere, while Farragut had as yet been given no active service. His rank—for he was nearly at the head of the navy list—made him of

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<sup>1</sup> The arrangement in three divisions on the night of the attack related solely to the order of battle, and had nothing to do with the permanent fleet organization.

itself a conspicuous candidate. One would have supposed that at this time, when the war had been in progress for eight months, the qualities of an officer of his position would have been definitely measured by the Secretary of the Navy. Apparently, however—at least, so says the Postmaster-General, Blair—his “ability was not at that time recognized” by the department.

Porter, however, knew Farragut well. The latter's close relation with the Porter family, begun when the commodore adopted him as a son, had continued during the larger part of his life. In the intervals of cruising he was always at home with the family in Chester. There he had his first schooling when David Porter, the future admiral, was a mere baby in arms; and there ten years later he came with his young wife soon after his first marriage. In 1823 Farragut served in Commodore Porter's West Indian squadron, on board the *Grayhound*, commanded by Commander John Porter, the brother of the commodore. Later, Commodore Porter transferred Farragut to his own vessel, the *Seagull*. Their attachment continued during the commodore's lifetime, and their correspondence, even down to his last years, shows the warmth of their mutual regard. A further connection lay in the fact that Farragut and William D. Porter, the commodore's eldest son, had married sisters; so that, although the younger David Porter had never served with Farragut until the New Orleans expedition, there were many ties which bound them together, and their relations were of the most cordial and friendly character. Porter knew well the professional qualities of his senior and believed him in the highest degree worthy to be entrusted with a great command; and in the preliminary discussions concerning the expedition he earnestly urged Farragut's appointment.

A question was raised, however, by the Secretary not only in regard to Farragut's ability and his willingness to undertake active service, but as to his loyalty, in view of his Southern birth and connections. In order that the Secretary might be satisfied on these points, it was determined that Porter should go to New York, see Farragut and talk with him, and, without letting him know anything of the expedition or committing the department in any way, obtain from Farragut such an expression of his views upon the war and its naval aspects as would enable Porter to form an opinion that would satisfy the department. This delicate mission was faithfully carried out. The written orders under which Porter proceeded, of course, made no mention of the interview with Farragut, and referred merely to the business of the mortar-flo-tilla, and to an inspection of the three ironclads then building, upon which the department also desired him to report.<sup>1</sup>

Porter went to New York on his mission on the 18th of November, and reported on his return that everything in the interview confirmed his previously expressed opinion that Farragut should be designated to command the expedition. The department deliberated over the question for five weeks longer, and certainly could not be charged with undue haste, for, though it finally adopted Porter's recommendation, it did not inform Farragut of his selection until the 21st of December. This was six weeks after the expedition had been decided on by the President. By this time the preparations had been far advanced, and Farragut entered upon the plan with alacrity and enthusiasm. Porter thus not only brought about the expedition, but the appointment of the officer who was to command it. He also named the chief of staff, Captain

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary Welles, in the *Galaxy*, vol. xii, p. 682.

Henry H. Bell, for on the 26th of December we find Farragut writing to Bell on the subject, saying that he did so at Porter's suggestion, and Bell accordingly became fleet captain.

Some controversial effort has been directed to minimizing Porter's share in the inception of the New Orleans expedition, particularly with a view to showing that both in the original idea and in the selection of a commander-in-chief the credit was due, not to Porter, but to the officials of the Navy Department. His exceptional position in the fleet excited a certain amount of professional jealousy, and some of the older officers were disposed to imagine—though nothing was further from the fact—the existence of a hostile rivalry between the two great admirals, in which it was incumbent upon them to side with their chief. Mr. Welles, who never quite forgave Porter for his share in the Fort Pickens expedition, made contributions to the controversy and stated in a paper written after the war that the Navy Department “began to consider” the question of operations in the lower Mississippi before Porter arrived in Washington. That the Navy Department had “begun to consider” during the summer of 1861 may well be admitted. It would have been extremely remiss in its duty and would have shown but a languid interest in the stirring events that were then taking place if it had not at least “begun to consider” the expediency of attack at every vulnerable seaport in the south. But that any actual plan for such an expedition had been digested, or even that such an expedition had been determined on or seriously considered as a practical question, is plainly not the case, as appears from Mr. Welles's own statements, already quoted. When Porter arrived in Washington it had not got beyond the conversational stage; “the views



of the department were speculative and uncertain ;” and the day after his arrival its adoption in the precise form which he proposed was an accomplished fact and the preparations to carry it out had been begun. It is idle to attempt to take away the merit of the conception as a conception of Porter’s by talking about the fruitless and desultory conversations of the previous summer. Whatever may have been the embryonic condition of the design of the New Orleans expedition before Porter arrived in Washington, it never took shape until that date. It may have been thought about, it may even have been talked about ; but its real beginning dates from the day when Porter had his first conferences with the President, the Secretary, and General McClellan.

So it was with the selection of the commander-in-chief. The choice was narrowed down to a very small number, of whom Farragut was easily one of the most conspicuous. It is established that Porter himself was Fox’s original selection, and that he would have had the command but for the question of rank. It is further established that after seven months of war neither the Secretary nor Fox had discovered Farragut’s extraordinary abilities, or thought of him in connection with any extraordinary service ; in fact, for seven months they had left him practically unemployed. It is evident from the Secretary’s narrative and it is conceded by Porter’s bitterest assailants that if Porter had opposed the selection of Farragut it would never have been made.<sup>1</sup> It is a fact beyond question that no one knew better than Porter the qualities of the older officers on the navy list or was better able to judge of them ; that among all these officers Farragut was the one whom Porter knew best and to whom he was most closely attached by the ties of family

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<sup>1</sup> Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, vol. ii, p. 70.



intimacy from boyhood; and that he earnestly urged the appointment. Finally, it is an undisputed fact that doubts and objections were raised to Farragut's appointment, not by Porter, but by the Secretary himself; that Porter had no such doubts; and that he was himself charged with the mission of sounding Farragut's mind in order to prove to the Secretary that they were without foundation.

The department had moved so cautiously in selecting the commander-in-chief that the details of preparation and the composition of the force had been practically decided without the benefit of his able advice and assistance. Farragut took the plan of the expedition precisely as it was disclosed to him in the latter part of December. He merely expressed his readiness to undertake the work with a smaller force and "offered to run by the forts with a less number of vessels." According to Welles, he also said that "while he would not have advised the mortar-flotilla, it might be of greater benefit than he anticipated, might be more efficient than he expected, and he willingly adopted it as a part of his command."<sup>1</sup> In the end, therefore, he wisely concluded that he would avail himself of all the resources which the department placed at his disposal, including both ships and mortar-vessels, and the elements of the expedition fortunately remained as originally adopted.

Much discussion has been given to the question as to what was really the original plan of the battle that resulted in the fall of New Orleans, and who was responsible for it, especially in reference to the alternative propositions of the reduction of the forts before attempting to pass them and the passage of the fleet without waiting for their reduction. There is no doubt who was respon-

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary Welles, in the *Galaxy*, vol. xii, p. 683.

sible for the plan upon which the battle was actually fought and who is entitled to the credit of the victory. This is, of course, the commander-in-chief. There might have been, and doubtless were, many suggestions considered in the preliminary discussions before Farragut was appointed. There were also explicit orders subsequently issued on the subject by the Navy Department; but however this may be, Farragut's plan of battle was the plan which he actually adopted and on which he fought the action and won the victory. So complete a misunderstanding has arisen, however, as to Porter's relation to this plan that it will be necessary to see where he stood in the matter, and for this purpose reference will be had to the evidence of contemporaneous documents and of witnesses who can not be suspected of bias.

As early as July, 1861, Porter had seen the importance of the capture of New Orleans, had made up his mind as to its practicability, had stated tersely how he thought it should be accomplished, and had expressed his exasperation that the Navy Department had done nothing about it. This is testified to by Admiral Bartlett, an unimpeachable witness, in the narrative of his interview with Porter at that time while on board the Powhatan. Porter's plan was definite. Given a sufficient number of good vessels, "he would undertake *to run by the forts* and capture New Orleans." Such was his statement in Bartlett's own words.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after, on the 13th of August, he left the blockade to go in quest of the Sumter. When he arrived in Washington in November he had heard nothing about New Orleans for three months. Presumably during that period the Confederates had done something to improve their defenses, and it was especially to be apprehended that some kind of obstruction would be

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<sup>1</sup> Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, vol. ii, pp. 60, 61, note.

placed in the river, as turned out to be actually the case. Except in so far as the possibility of additional defenses might modify the plan, Porter was precisely at the point of view that he had held in the previous summer—that the capture of New Orleans was necessary, that it was practicable, that the department had seriously neglected its duty in not attempting it, and that with a few good ships he would undertake to run past the forts and accomplish it. In view, however, of the increased efficiency of the defenses, especially with reference to obstructions, which he correctly assumed to have been effected, Porter's plan had been so far elaborated as to bring in two new elements: mortar-fire as a valuable adjunct in the attack "in case it should be necessary to bombard the forts before the fleet should attempt to pass them," and a certain force of troops to hold what might be won. This was the plan which he laid before the Secretary, which the Secretary immediately caused him to lay before the President, and upon which the President, in company with the Secretary, the Assistant Secretary, and Porter, immediately consulted the commanding general of the army; and it was the plan which all those participating in the council decided to adopt.

It is evident that not only the general plan of the expedition, but the tactical movement to be adopted at the forts, as developed in the preliminary discussions, was based upon the idea that before the fleet attempted a passage it would be necessary, or at least desirable, that the mortar-flotilla should attack the forts, as otherwise there was no object in taking the mortar-vessels; and apart from the positive benefit to be gained from them, they were a clumsy force to handle, and in the charge of any one but an officer who thoroughly understood how to handle them might impede the movements of the main

fleet. It was probably for this reason that Farragut raised a question about them. As it turned out, Porter handled them with consummate skill, and they proved to be no impediment whatever. It was, therefore, settled long in advance that the attack would probably begin with a mortar bombardment. The main fleet, remaining fresh and taking no part in this attack, would then be ready to make a dash by the forts whenever the opportunity should present itself. General Barnard was strongly opposed to the passage of the forts, and strenuously urged that they should first be reduced. He said: "To pass these works merely with a fleet and appear before New Orleans, is merely a raid, no capture."<sup>1</sup> But Farragut and Porter were both well aware—and it is difficult to believe that Fox was not of the same opinion—that the question could not be decided beforehand in the absence of information as to the conditions existing at the forts, if indeed a final decision could be reached before the arrival of the critical moment.<sup>2</sup> The Secretary of the Navy, however, adopted the views of General Barnard, and his final order to Farragut of January 20th peremptorily required him "to reduce the defenses which guard the approaches to New Orleans" before passing up to the city. This order was absolutely ignored and disregarded by Farragut when the time came for action, a step in which Porter, who was in perfect accord with Farragut as to the operations at the forts, heartily concurred.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, Army, xv, 420.

<sup>2</sup> Even Barnard says in his memorandum: "In sketching out an operation of this character it is useless to attempt to mark out beforehand that which must take its shape from the circumstances of the moment."

<sup>3</sup> Captain Mahan (Admiral Farragut, p. 126) has clearly pointed out that the order of the department left Farragut no discretion,

It was in pursuance of this idea that the strategic problem could only be solved on the spot that Porter drew up his famous "When the ships are over the bar" memorandum—his only recorded utterance, so far as is known, on the subject. This memorandum is a suggestion of the various methods which might be adopted in the movement against New Orleans, with observations as to the possible difficulty of one or another of them; but as to all, the memorandum expressly postulates the fact that the question must depend upon information which no one had when the paper was written and which could only be obtained when the fleet arrived on the ground, in the neighborhood of the forts. It is not known when the paper was prepared, whether in Washington before sailing or on the way down. It certainly was not written later.

The memorandum is as follows:

When the ships are over the bar, guns mounted, coal bunkers filled, sick on shore, hospital arrangements made for wounded, the fleet should move up, mortar fleet all in tow. The chain across the river to remain untouched for the present, or until after the mortars get their position and open their fire. It is a good defense on our side against fire-ships and rams which may be sent down the river, and our ships can so command the opening that nothing can pass down. As the mortar-vessels are somewhat helpless, they should be protected at all points by the vessels of war, which should be ready at a moment's notice to repel any attack on them by rams, floating torpedoes, or fire-ships; the two latter to be towed out of the way, the rams to be run down by the heavy ships, while such vessels as the

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and even goes so far as to say that "had Farragut, after leaving the forts unreduced, as he did, met with serious disaster, it can scarcely be doubted that the phrase quoted would have been used to acquit the Government."

Westfield and Clifton attack them end on with cannon, while gunboats try to force them to the shore. When everything is ready for the assault a demand for surrender should be made in language least calculated to exasperate and of such a nature as to encourage those who might be disposed to return to their allegiances. There is evidence of a strong Union feeling in New Orleans, and everything should be done without losing by delay to prevent a counter-feeling.

When it is evident that no surrender of the forts will be made the mortars should open deliberate fire, keeping two shells in the air all the time, or each mortar-vessel should fire once in every ten minutes. Fort Jackson, being casemated, should receive the largest share of the bombardment, three or four vessels being employed against Fort St. Philip, firing as often as they can coolly and conveniently load and point.

In the meantime preparations should be made to destroy at a moment's notice the vessels holding up the chain or the chain itself, which can be done by applying a petard to the bobstays of the vessels or to the chain, all of which petards are prepared, and a man accustomed to the business with a galvanic battery.

In my opinion there are two methods of attack: one is for the vessels to run the gantlet of the batteries by night or in a fog; the other is to attack the forts by laying the big ships close alongside of them, avoiding the casemates, firing shells, grape, and canister into the barbette, clearing the ramparts with boat guns from the top, while smaller and more agile vessels throw in shrapnel at shrapnel distance, clearing the parapets and dismounting the guns in barbette. The large ships should anchor with forty-five fathoms of chain with slip ropes; the smaller vessels to keep under way and be constantly moving about, some to get above and open a cross-fire; the mortars to keep up a rapid and continuous fire, and to move up to a shorter range. The objections to running by the forts are these: It is not likely that any intelligent enemy would fail to place a chain across *above the forts* and to raise such batteries



as would protect them against our ships. Did we run the forts we should leave an enemy in our rear, and the mortar-vessels would have to be left behind. We could not return to bring them up without going through a heavy and destructive fire. If the forts are run part of the mortars should be towed along, which would render the progress of the vessels slow against the strong current at that point. If the forts are first captured the moral effect would be to close the batteries on the river and open the way to New Orleans; whereas, if we don't succeed in taking them we will have to fight our way up the river. Once having possession of the forts, New Orleans would be hermetically sealed and we could repair damages and go up on our own terms and our own time.

Nature points out the English Turn as the position to be strongly fortified, and it is there the enemy will most likely make his strongest stand and last effort to prevent our getting up. If this point is impassable there is solid ground there, and troops can be brought up and landed below the forts and attack them in the rear while the ships assail them in front. The result will doubtless be a victory for us.

*If the ships can get by the forts and there are no obstructions above, then the plan should be to push on to New Orleans every ship that can be got up there, taking as many of the mortar-fleet as can be rapidly towed.*

An accurate reconnaissance should be made, and every kind of attainable information provided before any movement is made.

Nothing has been said about a combined attack of army and navy. Such a thing is not only practicable, but if time permitted should be adopted. Fort St. Philip can be taken with two thousand men covered by the ships; the ditch can be filled with fascines, and the wall is to be easily scaled with ladders. It can be attacked in front and rear.

The memorandum, which bore no date, was produced and read by Commander Alden at a conference of cap-



tains called by Farragut on board the Hartford on the third day of the bombardment, when Porter was not present; and by some most extraordinary oversight on the part of naval historians it has come to be regarded as a statement of Porter's final conclusions at that time when all the conditions had been ascertained, and especially as indicating his opposition to the passage of the forts. Nothing could be further from the fact. The mere opening sentence, "When the ships are over the bar, guns mounted, etc.," shows conclusively that it must have been written before the ships were over the bar. Most of the ships were over the bar shortly after the 18th of March, and the day of the conference was the 20th of April. As we shall presently see, at this later date Porter agreed entirely with Farragut as to the necessity of passing the forts, and of doing it as quickly as possible. The memorandum further says, "An accurate reconnoissance should be made, and every kind of attainable information provided before any movement is made." When this was written evidently no reconnoissance had been made and no information obtained, which again shows that it was written before the fleet arrived at the Passes in March. It is upon the results of the reconnoissance that Porter makes the question depend; and while, in the case of both Farragut and Porter, the first impression was that the forts should be run, both recognized the necessity of having local information before a final decision could be reached. Farragut even went so far as to leave open to himself, in his last General Order preceding the battle, the alternative plan of stopping to reduce the forts—a proper enough precaution, but one that he had no occasion to use.

In weighing the arguments *pro* and *con* as to the expediency of running the forts, Porter indicates the pos-

sible objections, which upon examination practically come down to one, that the enemy was certainly intelligent enough to place obstructions (chain) across the river *above* the forts. After the fleet had arrived at its station and made its reconnaissance, and it was found that there were no such obstructions and that the barrier below the forts could be destroyed, that objection disappeared; and at the same time it became evident that there was no occasion for taking the mortar-schooners along with the fleet in its passage. Porter plainly says in his memorandum: "If the ships can get by the forts and there are no obstructions above, then the plan should be to push on to New Orleans every ship that can be got up there." This was precisely the program that was carried out when it was found that there were no obstructions. In face of this statement it is impossible to maintain that Porter had any doubt about the expediency of the passage of the forts. On the other hand, it might be said with considerable force that Farragut had such doubts when he stated in his general order before the battle that the fleet, when it arrived in position before the forts, was to drop anchor or keep under way as in his opinion might be deemed best at the time. The fact is that both these officers realized, as General Lovell, the Confederate officer in command of the defenses of New Orleans, also realized, that it was perfectly possible for a fleet to pass the forts if there were no obstructions, but that if there was an efficient barrier the operation could not be successfully accomplished until the barrier was removed.<sup>1</sup>

The secret of the New Orleans expedition was well kept, and no suspicion of the project appears to have been

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<sup>1</sup> Lovell, testimony before court of inquiry, War Records, Army, vi, 562.

aroused until Farragut actually sailed from Hampton Roads in February. The activity in the neighborhood of Ship Island, off the coast of Mississippi, during the previous two months had caused some alarm, but the Confederate Government was entirely uncertain whether these movements were directed against New Orleans, Mobile, or Pensacola. The principal danger at New Orleans was apprehended from the descent of the river fleet from above. Nevertheless, extensive preparations for the defense of the city on both sides had early been made. In September a heavy barrier had been placed in position across the river opposite Fort Jackson. On October 18th General Lovell had been ordered to take command at New Orleans, and on the 5th of November he telegraphed the chief of ordnance at Richmond, insisting upon having additional guns. Prior to his arrival the keels of two heavy iron-clad vessels had been laid. None of these preparations were due to any information as to the expedition, for the expedition had not at that time been projected. From the time that he assumed command General Lovell began to strengthen the defenses with unremitting energy. The number of guns in the two forts was increased from sixty-two to one hundred and twenty-four, or exactly double; and the additional guns were all of heavier calibers. In fact, up to the time of the placing of the barrier and for some time after, the armament was such that Porter could have carried out his plan of the previous summer with the greatest ease.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The armament at that time in the two forts consisted only of forty-six old 24-pounders and sixteen 32-pounders, the last without carriages. The additions included, among others, nine 32-pounders, twelve 42-pounders, three 8-inch mortars, six 10-inch seacoast mortars, two 7-inch rifles, ten 8-inch columbiads, three 10-inch columbiads, and twelve 24-pounders. These additions much more

The two ironclads, as floating batteries for river defense, were of the most formidable character, and but for the extreme poverty of the Confederate naval resources, would have been finished in time for the battle. If properly equipped and commanded, they might have made the river impassable to Farragut's wooden fleet. When the critical moment arrived, however, the Mississippi was at the ship-yard, and the Louisiana, though she succeeded in dropping down to the forts, still had her mechanics on board and could not even work her engines.

Although the expedition was decided on before the middle of November, Farragut, as has been said, was not acquainted with the project until December 21st, and the attack did not actually take place until four months later. In January, 1862, he was formally assigned to the command of the West Gulf Blockading squadron, and on the 3d of February he sailed in his flag-ship, the Hartford, from Hampton Roads. His orders of January 20th, already referred to, imposed upon him, in addition to the supervision of the blockade, the duty of reducing the defenses of New Orleans and taking possession of the city, using for the purpose such vessels of his squadron as he might select. The orders stated: "There will be attached to your squadron a fleet of bomb-vessels, and armed steamers enough to manage them, all under command of Commander D. D. Porter, who will be directed to report to you. When these formidable mortars arrive and you are completely ready, you will collect such vessels as can be spared from the blockade, proceed up the Mississippi River, and *reduce the defenses* which guard the approaches to New Orleans, when you will appear off

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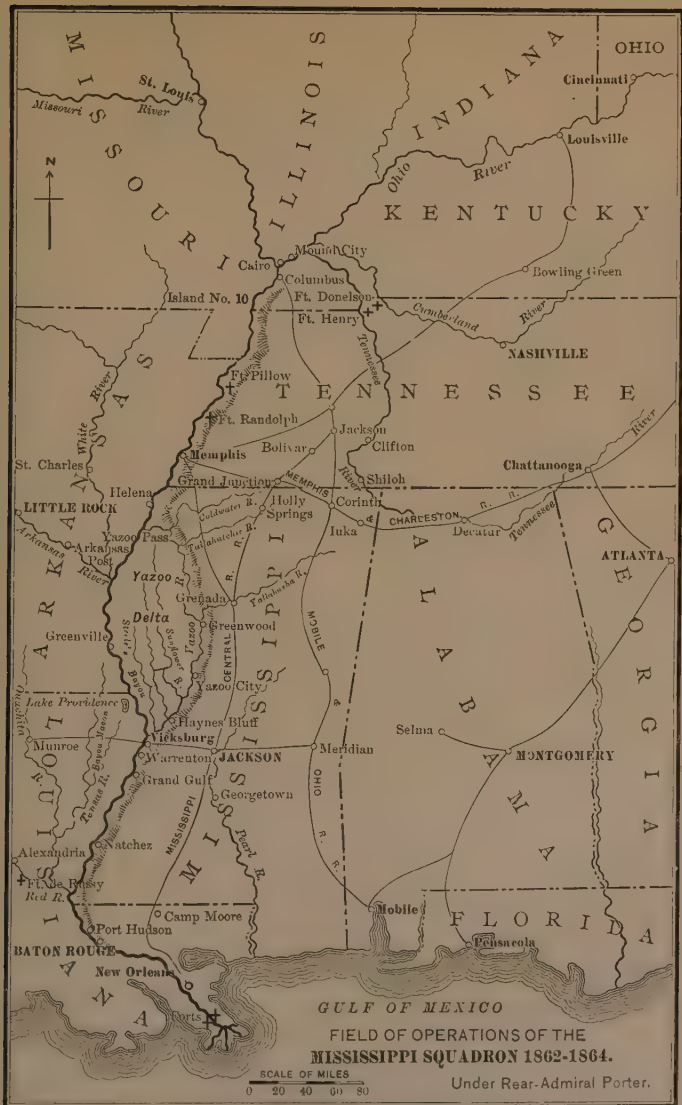
than doubled the strength of the batteries. For details, see Barnard's Memorandum, War Records, Army, xv, 413-421; Palfrey's report, *ibid.*, 435; Lovell's testimony, *ibid.*, vi, 559.

that city and take possession of it." The orders thus required the reduction of the forts before passing them, not a passage before reducing them. The vessels assigned to the expedition comprised the steam-frigate Colorado; the screw sloops Hartford, Brooklyn, Richmond, and Pensacola; the large side-wheeler Mississippi; the screw corvettes Oneida, Varuna, and Iroquois; and nine of the new gunboats commonly known, from the time in which they were built, as the "ninety-day gunboats." The Colorado did not take part in the expedition, as it was impossible to get her over the bar, but twenty of her guns were placed on board the other ships, and her captain, Bailey, was assigned by Farragut to command the first division of the fleet at the passage of the forts.

The mortar-flotilla consisted of twenty mortar-schooners and six steamers, the last including the side-wheel revenue-cutter Harriet Lane, the gunboat Owasco, the new double-ender Miami, and three converted Staten Island ferry-boats, the Clifton, Jackson, and Westfield, which turned out to be exceedingly useful river gunboats. The Coast-Survey steamer Sachem was also virtually a part of the flotilla. The mortar-schooners were employed as floating gun-platforms, and by themselves were helpless in the river. There was also attached to the fleet the sailing-sloop Portsmouth, which could not attempt the passage of the forts, but of whose battery of 8-inch guns Porter was able to make some use by towing her into position. The mortar-schooners were armed each with a 13-inch mortar and two 32-pounders, and were arranged in three divisions, the first commanded by Lieutenant Watson Smith, the second by Lieutenant Queen, and the third by Lieutenant Randolph Breese. The six steamers carried a very miscellaneous but effective armament, amounting in all to twenty-seven guns.

Porter, as divisional commander, took the *Harriet Lane* as his quasi flag-ship. She was commanded by Lieutenant Jonathan Wainwright, a brave and excellent officer, afterward killed at Galveston. It is related that when Porter went on board the ship at the Washington Navy-Yard, Wainwright, on receiving him, expressed some doubt about his ability to get Porter's sea-chest into the cabin. Porter told him with his customary mixture of jest and earnest to put it in the maintop, and get under way. Wainwright demurred that he had not all his coal on board and the ship was not ready for sea. "As to that," said Porter, "I never saw a ship in the navy that was ready for sea; you can finish your coaling at Hampton Roads or Port Royal." So the ship started at once. This was on February 12, 1862.

On the 28th the *Harriet Lane* arrived at Key West, having on the way down captured a blockade-runner off St. Augustine. The mortar-schooners had sailed from New York or Philadelphia between January 18th and February 10th, and upon Porter's arrival he found all but two or three awaiting him at Key West. The *Owasco*, which had left New York on the 5th of February, was also waiting there, and the *Miami* arrived shortly after. On the 6th of March the flotilla left Key West, arriving on the 18th off the mouth of the Mississippi, where it was joined by the *Clifton* and the *Westfield*. On the same day all the mortar-schooners, twenty in number, with the help of the steamers of the flotilla, crossed the bar at Pass à l'Outre and proceeded to Southwest Pass. Here they awaited orders, being ready at any moment to move to the attack. Owing to the delays of the principal fleet, however, it was exactly one month before the bombardment of the forts began. On the 19th of March Farragut wrote from Ship Island: "None of our vessels (meaning







store-ships) have yet arrived"; nor did they arrive until the very last moment.

The Hartford, the Brooklyn, and two or three of the gunboats had now entered the river. As the other heavy vessels came, great difficulties were experienced in getting them over the bar. The attempt to move the Colorado across was given up as hopeless. But determined efforts were made with three others of the larger ships, the Richmond, Mississippi, and Pensacola, which constituted a very important part of the force. The local pilots were either incompetent or unfriendly. The Richmond had been ordered to cross on March 3d, and had grounded seven times in her attempts, which were still unsuccessful. The Mississippi, coming later, was likewise unable to move, apparently drawing two feet more than the depth on the bar. The Pensacola was in the worst position of all, having struck, after several abortive efforts, on a sunken wreck a hundred yards away from the channel, where she lay helpless, with her screw half out of water, pounding on the wreck with the wind and sea. It was an anxious situation, and Porter, who knew the bar well, volunteered to Farragut to get the ships over if they were placed under his control. The flag-officer assenting, Porter tried his hand at the Richmond, and pulled her over at the first attempt. This was immediately after his arrival. Next he went to work on the Mississippi. She was stripped of everything—guns, projectiles, coal, spars, and provisions. When these were all out, Porter, by using all the steamers of the flotilla as tugs, got her through the mud, but only after eight days of incessant work. Last of all came the Pensacola, whose captain was much the senior of Porter, and had steadily refused his offers of assistance. As Farragut would not order Porter to do the work, the unwilling captain was

finally compelled to swallow his pride and write to Porter asking for assistance. The latter at once acceded, and borrowing the Colorado from Captain Bailey, passed a stream-cable to the stern of the Pensacola, and by backing hard with the frigate, swung the stranded vessel off. The next day he took her over the bar, which for a fortnight she had been vainly trying to cross. On the 8th of April Farragut wrote home, as well he might: "Yesterday was a day of rejoicing to me. We got the Pensacola over the bar, after two weeks' work. Now we are all right."

Owing to the non-arrival of his coal and stores, Farragut was obliged to wait a week longer before beginning the attack. On the same day his official despatch said: "I am happy to be able to announce to the department at last that the Mississippi and Pensacola are over the bar and are now preparing for their work up the river. The bomb flotilla are moving up in readiness to take their positions." (They had been ready to move up for three weeks past.) "General Butler . . . offered me coal to facilitate my movements, and I now find that our own vessels are beginning to arrive, so that my alarms on that account are dispelled, and so soon as the vessels can coal and get their stores and munitions of war on board we will be ready to proceed up the river." On the 21st he writes: "We commenced the bombardment of Fort Jackson on the 16th (18th), which was the earliest day possible after the arrival of coal." Even at that time, when the bombardment was nearly over, he still lacked indispensable ordnance stores, including shells, fuses, and grape and canister shot, all of which, together with the medical stores, only arrived on the following day. It can not therefore be said that the mortar-flotilla was in any respect a source of delay.

The two forts upon which New Orleans mainly relied in case of attack from below, had now, after six months of incessant work, been put in a condition of great defensive strength. Fort Jackson, the more formidable of the two, on the west bank, was a casemated work of masonry in the shape of a star, mounting sixty-seven guns, with an important water-battery of six guns, or seventy-three in all, and was so situated at a point in the bend of the river that it commanded the approaches up and down. Fort St. Philip, half a mile higher up, on the east bank, mounted only fifty-one guns, all in barbette, with a low parapet, easily swept by the batteries of a passing fleet. The current against which the ships would have to contend in ascending the river was over three knots, and the boom or line of obstructions, which had been placed across the river opposite Fort Jackson, consisted of a number of hulks anchored and connected by chains and extending into midstream, and continued by a line of rafts and chains to the opposite bank. The boom had been much damaged by the floods and drifts of the previous winter, but it had been hurriedly restored, and again made an efficient barrier. The main reliance of the Confederates was Fort Jackson, that fort being the one which commanded the first approach, and which was nearest to the line of obstructions, having a battery half as powerful again as its upper neighbor, and having its guns largely protected by masonry casemates, while those of Fort St. Philip were entirely exposed. For these reasons, Fort Jackson became the special object of the preliminary attack of Porter's bombs.

The Confederate force afloat consisted nominally of fourteen vessels, mounting forty guns. Of these, six belonged to the Confederate navy, two to the State of Louisiana, and the remaining six to a rather independent

organization, known as the River Defense fleet, commanded by river-steamboat captains. These last did much as they pleased and were of no service in the defense, suffering a complete collapse in their first encounter with Farragut's force. One of the two State gunboats, the Governor Moore, commanded by Lieutenant Beverley Kennon, a dashing and heroic officer, took the largest part in the struggle above the forts, in spite of her small armament. Of the six naval vessels, two were merely launches, and one, the Jackson, hardly deserved the name of a gunboat. The other three comprised a well-armed gun-vessel, the McRae; the ram Manassas, commanded by the intrepid and resourceful Lieutenant Warley; and the ironclad Louisiana. Of these, the last was far and away the most powerful—much more than a match, in fact, considering her armor, for any vessel in the attacking fleet. She carried two 7-inch rifles, three 9-inch and four 8-inch smoothbores, and seven rifled 32-pounders. But she was not quite finished; her decks had little protection, so that she was vulnerable to mortar-fire; her wheels would not work, so that she was destitute of motive power, a mere floating battery; and down to the moment of the battle she was filled with workmen, who were trying to finish her. Commander Mitchell, who commanded the Confederate force afloat, insisted on keeping her in a position above Fort St. Philip, being apprehensive that she would be disabled if brought within range of Porter's mortars. She was therefore a small factor in the actual defense.

At the time the ships crossed the bar both Farragut and Porter were still ignorant of the conditions existing in and about the Plaquemine forts. They had only such information as the War Department had been able to furnish of their construction and previous armament. What

guns had been added since and how they were mounted, what were the nature and position of the obstructions, if any, above or below the forts, what were the number, character, and armament of the Confederate vessels—in short, what were the conditions to be met in the attack—the expedition up to this time was entirely ignorant. Barnard's memorandum, prepared just before Farragut sailed, shows that the Government at that time was absolutely in the dark as to the character and extent of the Confederate preparations. Until such information was acquired a plan of action could only be provisional. The first thing to do was to obtain this information. Little or none could be gained beforehand from the ordinary sources, such as spies and deserters. The only available method was to make a thorough and exhaustive reconnaissance. This was the first step in Porter's plan of operations, as set forth in the provisional memorandum which he had prepared before the ships had entered the river and which has already been quoted at length. "An accurate reconnaissance should be made and every kind of attainable information provided before any movement is made." This is the key-note of the memorandum, the one indispensable thing which, in Porter's mind, was to be done before anything else, and which was to determine what course should be pursued.

We must pause here to dwell for a moment upon the peculiar relation that existed between Farragut and Porter in reference to the plan of operations at New Orleans. It is not intended for an instant to suggest that Porter in any way usurped or sought to usurp the functions of the commander-in-chief, but he occupied a position totally different from that of the other captains of the fleet in respect to the plan. Although the junior of at least a dozen of these captains, and of most of them very much

the junior, his initiative in the first conception of the expedition, his dominating influence in shaping its details during the six weeks before its commanding officer had been consulted or even selected, and his assignment to the command of a separate division with a separate organization only subordinate to the commander-in-chief himself, gave him a relation to the enterprise quite apart from that to which his mere rank would have entitled him. This fact was fully recognized by Farragut. Apart from the personal and family ties between them and Farragut's high regard for Porter's opinion, Farragut could not fail to recognize Porter's relation to the undertaking, for all the facts that created it were evident to him when he answered the summons of the Navy Department on the 21st of December. Every personal and official consideration, therefore, led him to take Porter into his confidence and counsel in a peculiar and exceptional way, especially with reference to the plan of operations; and Porter's connection with this plan was maintained from first to last. During the whole critical fortnight preceding the final attack the flag-officer was in constant personal intercourse and consultation with Porter on a footing quite distinct from that of his other commanding officers, and even of his fleet captain, Bell. The result of these consultations was a perfect unanimity of opinion between them as to the course to be pursued—a course, be it said, which was in disregard of the express orders of the department.

As has been already observed, the first object at which Porter aimed was a reconnaissance. In respect to this, he showed that foresight and thoroughness of preparation, and that keen eye for important details, which were characteristic of all his professional work. Anticipating precisely the difficulties under which the flotilla would



labor, and knowing from his Coast Survey experience how to meet them, Porter had obtained from Bache, the Superintendent of the Coast Survey, a staff of surveyors who had been brought down in the steamer *Sachem*, and whose services he now called into requisition. The difficulties of navigation in the rapid current of the tortuous river, the impossibility of determining ranges without accurate measurement, the uncertainty as to the position and character of the guns in the two forts, and of the line of obstructions above or below them, made necessary an examination of the locality which could not have been effected by ordinary methods. Porter's foresight had supplied means for these observations, and the flag-officer left it entirely to him to carry them out. Never was an operation of this kind more thoroughly performed. Each day, at sunrise, Porter had a consultation with Gerdes, the chief of the Coast Survey party, on board the *Harriet Lane* or the *Sachem*, and the work for the day was laid out. Each day the surveying parties set out in their boats under the protection of steamers of the flotilla assigned to the duty, and were landed with their theodolites at the selected points on one bank or the other, with an armed escort to keep off the enemy's scouting parties, and pursued their appointed tasks until the work of the day was finished. Each evening they returned to the *Sachem* and mapped out the localities from their notes. In four or five days the course of the river and both its banks, for a distance of seven miles, were triangulated and mapped, and the maps were supplied to the fleet.

It is worth while to notice in some detail the work of these five days preceding the bombardment. On Sunday, the 13th, Porter, in the *Harriet Lane*, with the other steamers of the flotilla, moved up beyond the ad-

vance vessels of the fleet into the line of fire to make his first observation of the enemy's position and to draw the attention of the forts from the surveying parties. A company of Confederate sharpshooters had been sent down from the forts and stationed in the woods on the two banks. Before the surveying parties were landed the Owasco cleared the thickets with canister. The other gunboats of the flotilla continued their advance, causing the retreat of two of the enemy's boats which were acting as vedettes and bringing within range the whole of their flotilla, consisting of eight vessels, then lying under the guns of Fort Jackson. In the engagement which followed, a shot from the 100-pounder rifle of the Westfield disabled the Confederate gunboat Defiance. The demonstration had the desired effect of drawing the fire of the forts, which enabled the reconnoitering gunboats to determine the position and character of the enemy's batteries. By night, when the flotilla withdrew, the parties on shore had worked up to within three miles of the forts, the last lines of the day being observed on the flagstaff of Fort St. Philip.

On Monday, the 14th, after a consultation with Gerdes at sunrise, Porter determined that the surveyors should fix the position of the line of hulks supporting the chain of obstructions in the river. Again the parties were landed at the designated points, and again the Owasco, now supported by the Westfield, was occupied during most of the day in firing grape and canister and in shelling the woods to drive out the enemy's sharpshooters. On this day the telegraph-wires were discovered in the woods and cut, and telegraphic communication below the forts was destroyed. Again the flotilla had an exchange of shots with the enemy's steamers, and, although the surveying parties were fired on, they continued their

observations, carrying their triangulation well up in the direction of the forts and mapping out their work on their return to the vessel.

Early on Tuesday, the 15th, Porter went on board the *Sachem*, and again the day's work was determined. Upon this day the surveyors ascended within a mile and a half of the fort, and succeeded in getting intersections on the hulks and the two flagstaffs of the forts. The enemy's sharpshooters had attempted the night before to restore telegraphic communication, but had failed, and after removing the signals of the surveying parties, had abandoned all further attempts at molesting them. On this day the *Owasco* was supported by the *Miami*, and again tried the range of her guns upon Fort Jackson.

The next two days, Wednesday and Thursday, the 16th and 17th, were occupied in final preparations for the bombardment, while the surveyors were still at work completing their triangulation. On Wednesday the *Harriet Lane* and the *Owasco* towed up three mortar-schooners to a position on the east bank, to determine by experiment the ranges on the forts and the general position in which the boats were to be stationed. The forts fired several shots at them, but without effect. On Thursday, Porter called upon the surveyors to furnish him with points one hundred yards apart on both banks of the river at which the mortar-vessels were to be placed and to mark the precise distances. This was done during the day for both sides of the river, and a line of flags was set up on the bank indicating the position of each schooner. The surveyors had now completed their general map. At a conference that day between the flag-officer and Porter, it was submitted to the former, who expressed his lively appreciation of the finish with which the work

had been done. It was decided that the bombardment should begin on the following day. Copies of the map were made and distributed to the fleet. During this night the enemy sent down several fire-rafts, but they were taken in tow by the boats of the flotilla and did no injury.

The reconnaissance was now completed and everything was ready for the bombardment. At daylight on the morning of the 18th Porter got under way with all the steamers of the flotilla. He had with him in the *Harriet Lane* one of the surveyors who had marked the positions the day before, and as the *Westfield* and *Clifton* came up with tow after tow, each consisting of two or three mortar-boats, the latter were stationed in their designated places at given distances from the forts. Porter had directed the masts of the schooners to be dressed down with bushes to make them invisible to the enemy, their coverings intermingling in appearance with the thick foliage and matted vines beside them. This accomplished its purpose, for none of the mortar-boats could be seen from the forts, although their approximate position was known, and to this was largely due the inability of the enemy to dislodge them. As the bushes were blown away during the bombardment they were renewed and the masts and ropes kept covered from view. Six of the vessels, comprising the second division, under Lieutenant *Queen*, were placed on the east bank and the remaining fourteen on the west bank, the headmost vessel of the former being 3,680 yards from Fort Jackson and of the latter 2,850 yards. The distance to Fort St. Philip was about 800 yards greater. Porter personally supervised the placing of each vessel. Meantime the *Owasco* was sent ahead to clear the woods and to cover the schooners from the fire of the forts, which

presently opened on the flotilla. As the fire became hot and was concentrated upon the *Owasco*, Porter, when it was at its thickest, went on board of her to observe the movements of the enemy and to tell Guest, her captain, that he had asked that some of the vessels of the fleet should be sent up in support. In compliance with Porter's request, an hour later the *Iroquois* and some of the gunboats came up to divert the enemy's fire.

By nine o'clock on the morning of the 18th the leading mortar-schooners had got into position and commenced firing, the others following rapidly and opening as soon as their stations were taken. Each boat fired a shell every ten minutes, making two a minute for the whole flotilla, the forts replying vigorously. By midday the fire on the eastern division became so rapid and the shot fell so close that Porter decided to change their positions. At this time a 120-pounder shell had passed through the cabin and damaged the magazine of Queen's leading vessel, the *Ward*, coming out near the water-line. Her rigging was cut and shells were flying over her fast. The *Mangham*, the fourth vessel in the line, had received a 10-inch shot also near her water-line. This led Porter to move them both two hundred yards farther astern, throwing the enemy out of his range.

It had been determined, for the reasons already stated, that the principal attack of the mortars should be upon Fort Jackson. During the day over one thousand shell were fired, of which great numbers lodged in and around the fort. The barracks within the fort were burned, as well as the citadel, and though the garrison held out gallantly during the remainder of the bombardment, the work of demoralization which finally resulted in the surrender of the forts was effectually begun. General Duncan, commanding the defenses below New Orleans, in

his official report of April 30, 1862, says of the mortar-fire on the first day :

The quarters in the bastion were fired and burned down early in the day, as well as all the quarters immediately without the fort. The citadel was set on fire and extinguished several times during the first part of the day, but later it became impossible to put out the flames, so that when the enemy ceased firing it was one burning mass, greatly endangering the magazines, which at one time were reported to be on fire. Many of the men and most of the officers lost their bedding and clothing by these fires, which greatly added to the discomforts of the overflow. The mortar-fire was accurate and terrible, many of the shells falling everywhere within the fort and disabling some of our best guns.

Of this situation Porter says in his report :

Had I known the extent of the fire, I should have proceeded all night with the bombardment; but the crews had had nothing to eat or drink since daylight. I knew not how much the mortar beds and vessels might have suffered. Night firing was uncertain, as the wind had set in fresh, and not knowing how long a bombardment I might have to go through with, I deemed it best to be prudent. A little after sunset I ordered the firing to cease, and made the only mistake that occurred during the bombardment.

In connection with the outspoken frankness and manliness of this self-criticism, it is worth while to quote what Porter says in the same report of his subordinates, to whom he always gave full credit, and in fact, in his splendid generosity, rather more than their share of the credit. He says :

It would be an interminable undertaking if I were to attempt to give a minute account of all the hard work performed in the flotilla or mention separately all the meritorious acts and patient endurance of the commanders and crews

of the mortar-vessels. All stuck to their duty like men and Americans, and though some may have exhibited more ingenuity and intelligence than others, yet the performance of all commanded my highest admiration. I can not say too much in favor of the three commanders of divisions, Lieutenants Watson Smith, W. W. Queen, and K. R. Breese. I can only say that I would like always to have them at my side in times of danger and difficulty. They were untiring in their devotion to their duties, directing their officers, who could not be supposed to know as much about their duties as they did. I left the entire control of these divisions to themselves, trusting implicitly that they would faithfully carry out the orders which I had given them previous to the bombardment, and knowing that no powder or shell would be thrown away if they could help it. The end justified my confidence in them. During a bombardment of six days they were constantly exposed to a sharp fire from heavy guns.

One would hardly gather from Porter's statement that during the entire bombardment he was himself constantly moving about among the vessels of the flotilla under fire, watching every development and personally directing and carrying out every change in the disposition of the vessels. At two o'clock that night, after a careful examination of the vessels and mortar-boats, he moved Queen's division to the west bank, which was a safer and closer position.

On the 19th Porter began the day with a conference with Gerdes, of the Coast Survey, to arrange for some further changes in the position of the schooners. The flotilla opened fire at six in the morning, and continued it throughout the day. At an early hour Porter repaired on board the flag-ship to confer with the flag-officer. This done, he returned to the flotilla, and about nine o'clock the mortar-schooner Carlton was sunk by a rifle-



shell passing through her deck, magazine, and bottom. Porter was alongside of her in an instant and held her up to the bank, thus saving most of her stores and arms, but she finally slipped off and went to the bottom. Porter then went on board the *Owasco*, which at this time was in the advance and exchanging a sharp fire with Fort Jackson. Here he remained to watch the course of the battle. The bombardment was continued until late in the afternoon.

Of this day's fire General Duncan says:

The enemy's fire was excellent, a large proportion of his shells falling within Fort Jackson. The terreplein, parade plain, parapets, and platforms were very much cut up, as well as much damage done to the casemates. The magazines were considerably threatened and one shell passed through into the casemate containing fixed ammunition. One 10-inch and one 8-inch columbiad, one 32- and one 24-pounder, and one 10-inch siege mortar were disabled in the main work; also two rifled 32-pounders in the water-battery.

On the next day, Sunday, the 20th, a deserter came in from Fort Jackson who "represented hundreds of shells falling into the fort, casemates broken in, citadel and outbuildings burned, men demoralized and dispirited, magazine endangered, and the levee cut," which accords closely with the statements of General Duncan, already quoted from his report.

On this same morning of Sunday, before the deserter's information had been received, the flag-officer had a conference with Porter which went far to determine the final plan of operations. By this time the facts were known upon which a rational opinion could be formed. The enemy's position was fairly well understood and the extent of his resources for disabling the fleet or retarding its advance. The exact position and character of the line

of obstructions were also known; and the plan for destroying it, which had long before been outlined in Porter's memorandum, was shown to be practicable. It was known, too, that there was no second line of obstructions above the forts or anything that would prevent the continued advance of the fleet if it once got by. It was not known that the powerful iron-clad Louisiana was about to be brought down and added to the defense, and of course it was also unknown that her defects of construction reduced greatly her value for the purpose. The Louisiana was therefore not considered either way in selecting a plan of action. The rapid mortar practice had expended an immense quantity of ammunition, and, although the supply was replaced and turned out to be sufficient even for the bombardment as it was finally protracted, yet the rapid consumption of shells gave some concern. How far Fort Jackson had suffered could not be accurately told, but it was apparent that nothing would be gained by deferring unduly the final attack. Porter's memorandum shows that he had never supposed the bombardment by the mortars to be anything more than a preliminary to this attack, and in his opinion, as well as that of the flag-officer, the time had now come to try conclusions. It was therefore agreed between them that the line of obstructions should be opened that night by the method mentioned in the memorandum.

It is clear from the surrounding circumstances that at the same interview the general plan of the battle was adopted, namely, that the two divisions of the force should be employed for two separate purposes: the fleet proper to rush by the forts if possible, and the mortar-flotilla to come close up and concentrate its efforts in an attack upon Fort Jackson, leaving the fleet free to

expend all its energies upon Fort St. Philip. The flotilla was not in any case to attempt the passage. It was to take up the most advantageous position for a stationary attack on Fort Jackson and to remain in that position during the whole of the battle, whatever might be the outcome to the main fleet.

At the conclusion of the interview Porter left the flag-ship to continue the operations of the bombardment. Part of the morning was spent in renewing the supply of ammunition for the mortar-schooners with the assistance of the gunboats. The steamers lay close to the mortar-vessels and delivered the ammunition, being all the time under fire, but fortunately none of the vessels were struck.

Shortly after Porter's departure signal was made for all commanding officers to report on board the flag-ship, and in obedience to the order all the captains came except three, who were on guard duty. None of the captains of the mortar-flotilla reported, as all were in action. Captain Bell, the fleet captain, was also present, and has given in his diary the only account that we have of what took place. "The flag-officer," says Bell, "unfolded his plan of operations, assigning the places for every vessel in the fleet in the attack, and exhibited charts of the river and of the forts." Some discussion taking place thereupon, Commander Alden, of the *Richmond*, took out of his pocket and read the memorandum which, as has already been shown, had been written by Porter a month—or possibly several months—before. How Alden got this memorandum, or when he got it, or why he produced it upon this occasion, is not known. In the then situation of affairs it could only have a historical interest, for its views were expressly made to depend upon circumstances that at the time of writing were unknown. The probab-

ity appears to be that at some time or other, in some previous conversation in Porter's cabin, the memorandum had been referred to, and Alden had taken it to look over at his leisure. Bell represents that it was a letter to Farragut, which Alden was charged to deliver—a rather strained supposition. As might be expected, the flag-officer, having fully discussed the whole subject with Porter in their interview that morning, paid no particular attention to the reading, and it was only at Bell's suggestion that a copy was left with him. The memorandum began by stating that “when the ships are over the bar the fleet should move up.” At the time of the conference most of the ships had been over the bar for four weeks, and the last two of them for nearly two weeks, and the fleet had moved up. It said also what should be done before the mortars got their position and opened fire. The mortars had now been in position and had been engaged in the bombardment for over three days. It gave suggestions as to how this bombardment should be conducted, which suggestions had been duly carried out. It proposed preparations to destroy the chain, which had been determined on by Farragut that very morning in the conference with Porter, a fact of which Bell, or at least the other captains, seemed not to be aware. It stated, in considering the different plans of attack, that the principal objection to running by the forts was the fact that a second barrier might be placed above them; but Porter had known for several days that no such barrier existed, and consequently that his alternative objections had fallen to the ground with the assumed state of facts upon which they were predicated. Finally it said that “an accurate reconnaissance should be made and every kind of attainable information provided before any movement is made”; and the reconnaissance had been made and every attainable

information had been provided by the efforts of Porter himself—a reconnaissance, in fact, such as few commanding officers would have taken the trouble to make and the thoroughness of which left nothing to be desired.

Captain Bell's account shows that he misunderstood completely the drift of the memorandum and failed to see that most of it related to a state of facts long since past. Farragut, however, saw it plainly. Says Captain Bell, referring to the memorandum: "It was therein stated that, the boom being a protection to the mortars against attacks of all kinds from above, the boom should not be destroyed until the forts are reduced." As a matter of fact, the memorandum says nothing of the kind. It says: "The chain across the river to remain untouched for the present, or until after the mortars get their position and open their fire," which is quite a different matter. Bell evidently had only a vague idea of what the memorandum contained. Farragut dismissed this suggestion with the simple comment that "the commander [Porter] had this morning assented to the propriety of the boom being broken to-night"; in other words, that the suggestions in the memorandum were ancient history.

The remainder of the entry in the diary is made unintelligible by Captain Bell's incoherent recital, and does not call for much attention. It is impossible to give any reasonable explanation of these sentences:

Upon this the flag-officer remarked that the commander had this morning assented to the propriety of the boom being broken to-night, which I heard, and again, that the fleets should not go above the forts, as the mortar-fleet would be left unprotected. The flag-officer thought the mortars would be as well protected above as below the forts.

Whether the first sentence means that the flag-officer remarked that the fleet should not go above the forts, as

its construction would indicate, or that the commander had assented to the proposition that the fleet should not go above the forts, which is also a grammatical construction, is not clear; but the statement is inexplicable, whichever construction is adopted. Farragut certainly never made such a remark, nor did Porter ever assent to it. The next sentence is even more obscure. How the flag-officer could possibly have said that he "thought the mortars would be as well protected above as below the forts," when he had fully decided that the mortars should in any case remain below, is beyond comprehension. The General Order which Farragut drew up immediately after the conference indicates that he had no intention of taking the mortars along with him, and that he had at that time fully decided upon what had come to be one of the most marked features in the final plan of operations, namely, the division of the work between the fleet proper and the mortar-flotilla, by which the latter was to take care of Fort Jackson while the fleet was assailing Fort St. Philip.

According to Captain Bell in his account of the conference, when Farragut unfolded his plan of passing the forts, "some of the captains and commanders considered it a hazardous thing to go above, as being out of the reach of supplies." From Bell's account, this was the only subject about which there was much discussion or difference of opinion at the council. Farragut expressed himself as having come to a decision. Some of his captains and commanders who had not the enterprise and resolution that characterized the commander-in-chief took a different view. Porter, however, was not there, and it has been assumed that his judgment of the situation at that date was disclosed by the old memorandum which Alden took it upon himself to read and Bell strangely mis-

quoted. The memorandum itself, written though it was long before the occasion of its production, leaves no doubt as to Porter's views upon the fundamental question of the passage of the forts. There is no ambiguity in these words:

If the ships can get by the forts and there are no obstructions above, then the plan should be to push on to New Orleans every ship that can get up there.

The General Order drawn up by Farragut immediately after the council and published on the following day is as follows:

The flag-officer, having heard all the opinions expressed by the different commanders, is of the opinion that whatever is to be done will have to be done quickly or we will be again reduced to a blockading squadron without the means of carrying on the bombardment, as we have nearly expended all the shells and fuses and material for making cartridges. He has always entertained the same opinions which are expressed by Commander Porter—that is, there are three modes of attack, and the question is, which is the one to be adopted? His own opinion is that a combination of two should be made, viz., the forts should be run, and when a force is once above the forts to protect the troops, they should be landed at quarantine from the Gulf side by bringing them through the bayou, and then our forces should move up the river, mutually aiding each other as it can be done to advantage.

When in the opinion of the flag-officer the propitious time has arrived, the signal will be made to weigh and advance to the conflict. If in his opinion at the time of arriving at the respective positions of the different divisions of the fleet we have the advantage, he will make the signal for close action, No. 8, and abide the result—conquer or to be conquered, *drop anchor or keep under way*, as in his opinion is best.



Unless the signal above mentioned is made, it will be understood that the first order of sailing will be formed after leaving Fort St. Philip, and we will proceed up the river in accordance with the original opinion expressed.

Two or three things in this order are worth noticing. The first is that Farragut proposes distinctly to run by the forts, but at the same time reserves to himself the possibility, in reference to which he might give the order, if occasion should arise, of not running by the forts but of continuing the attack upon them until they should be reduced. He says:

If in his opinion at the time of arriving at the respective positions of the different divisions of the fleet we have the advantage, he will make the signal for close action, No. 8, and abide the result—conquer or to be conquered, drop anchor or keep under way, as in his opinion is best.

This means that while Farragut's opinion no doubt was, like that of Porter, that, there being no obstructions above the forts, the forts should be run; nevertheless, he should leave open to himself and hold out as possible to his captains the alternative plan of attempting the reduction of the forts, even to the extreme course of anchoring in front of them, if at the moment he found it desirable.

The second point to be noticed in the General Order is that it makes no provision for taking any vessel, either steamers or schooners, of the mortar-flotilla with the fleet in its passage of the forts. The diagram accompanying the order shows the position of each individual vessel in the column, but includes none of Porter's vessels. For these last a totally different arrangement was provided, and nothing was said of this arrangement in the General Order, because it was the subject of a verbal understanding with Commander Porter himself. It is not a little

remarkable that in these elaborate preparations for battle and the various directions that were issued thereupon, and, in fact, for all the operations connected with the expedition, no instruction in writing, as far as is known, was given by Farragut to Porter from the time that Porter arrived on the 18th of March at the mouth of the Mississippi until after the passage of the forts. Everything was decided in oral conferences—not an order or memorandum was put on paper—yet the part assigned to Porter in the operation was of the most vital importance, for by it the defensive force of the nearest and most powerful of the two forts was in a great measure neutralized, and the advancing fleet was enabled to confine its attention chiefly to its lesser and more vulnerable adversary.

The third fact to be noticed in connection with the General Order is the singular prominence which it gives to the opinion of Commander Porter. Nothing could be more significant of the exceptional position that Porter held in the expeditionary force and the exceptional relation to which he was admitted by the commander-in-chief than this peculiar and exceptional reference to him in the General Order to the fleet setting forth the proposed plan of a great battle. Porter was the junior commander of the fleet and had been promoted but a year before from the grade of lieutenant; in short, from the rank of a subaltern officer. Why should the flag-officer have singled him out from among all his fellows and given public notice to the entire fleet that “he has always entertained the same opinions which are expressed by Commander Porter”? Why should not Farragut have referred to Bailey, the captain of the Colorado, who was almost his own contemporary, or to his fleet captain, Bell, or to Wainwright, commanding the Hartford, or Morris of the Pensacola, Craven of the

Brooklyn, Lee of the Oneida, Swartwout of the Portsmouth, Smith of the Mississippi, Boggs of the Varuna, De Camp of the Iroquois, or Alden of the Richmond? Every one of these was senior to Porter, and most of them far in advance of him in seniority. It was the same reason which led the flag-officer, according to Captain Bell, in the council of captains on that day to say that Porter had that morning "assented to the propriety" of the boom being broken, as if Porter's assent were necessary to the adoption of the measure. It was because Porter was recognized as the originator of the enterprise with which he had been identified from the beginning. It was because he had been the principal adviser of the Navy Department in the preparations for the undertaking; because, in defiance of the established traditions of the service, he had been given a distinct command of nearly thirty vessels, under the orders of Farragut, but separate from the general fleet organization and constituting a squadron or flotilla attached to the fleet as a distinct unit; and finally, by the fact which his assignment recognized and made patent to all that, notwithstanding his subordinate rank, his established position and reputation in the service placed him, independently of his seniority, among the foremost of its officers.

Toward midnight on the night of the 20th the plan which had been agreed upon by Farragut and Porter in the morning of destroying the boom was carried out by two gunboats of the fleet, the Itasca and Pinola, under Lieutenants Caldwell and Crosby, the flotilla co-operating by a heavy and rapid shelling of the forts. Captain Bell was on board the Pinola, in command of the detachment. It was an undertaking of the greatest difficulty, owing to the peculiar conditions existing, and

especially to the swift current and the exposed position of the gunboats under the fire of both the forts. The explosion could not be made as intended, because, in the difficulty of controlling the movements of the vessels, the wires broke and rendered the original design abortive. Caldwell, however, in the *Itasca*, succeeded in breaking the chain by other means, and his exploit was one of the most gallant and effective of the war. It was made possible by the heavy fire of the mortar-flotilla, which Porter increased to the utmost limit, and which so distracted the attention of the forts that the operation of the gunboats was undisturbed. Although the *Itasca* got ashore and remained for some time in that position, and though the original plan was unsuccessful, the chains were broken, the hulks swung wide apart, and the gunboats came back uninjured. Crosby stated that they would have been destroyed but for the rapid and accurate fire of the mortars, and Farragut in his report says:

Commander Porter kept up such a tremendous fire on them from the mortars that the enemy's shot did the gunboats no injury, and the cable was separated and their connection broken sufficiently to pass through on the left bank of the river.

General Duncan says:

Under cover of the heaviest shelling during the bombardment thus far, one of the enemy's gunboats came up in the darkness and attempted to cut the chains of the raft and drag off the schooners. A heavy fire was opened upon her, which caused her to retire, but not until she had partially accomplished her purpose. The raft after this could not be regarded as an obstruction.

As in consequence of Caldwell's brilliant achievement the raft could no longer "be regarded as an obstruc-

tion," it might safely be said that the Itasca not only partially but wholly accomplished her purpose.

Up to this time Farragut had been unable to assume the offensive, as the necessary ordnance and medical stores for the fleet had not yet arrived. These only reached him on the 21st, the day after the boom was broken. The conditions of wind and current, however, still led him to postpone his attack. On the afternoon of Tuesday, the 22d, signal was again made from the Hartford for all commanding officers. Again Porter's duties compelled him to be absent. From Lieutenant J. M. Wainwright, commanding the Harriet Lane, who was among those present, we have an account somewhat more exact and complete than that given by Bell of the occurrences at the previous council on Sunday. Says Wainwright:

The flag-officer then proceeded to state the reason why the officers had been summoned, which was to give his plan for passing the forts and the disposition he proposed to make of the forces under his command. He premised by saying that Captain Porter had submitted a plan of operations which embraced ideas similar to his own and with which he entirely agreed. He then proceeded to state his plans, and invited the opinion of the officers there assembled.

The prevailing opinion seemed to be averse to making the attempt to pass the forts at that time; that it was premature; that the forts had not yet been sufficiently reduced by the fire of the mortar-vessels; and that the risk of the loss of too many vessels was too great to be run. The question was freely asked why the mortar-vessels could not continue the bombardment for a length of time, the idea of which appeared to be rather indefinite unless it was expected that the reduction of the forts should be owing to the mortar-vessels entirely, when the ships would be able to pass in comparative safety.

The flag-officer said he agreed in the main with what had been said, but that Captain Porter urged very strongly the attempt being made, not only on the grounds of its probable success, but from the fact that the fire of the mortar-vessels could not be sustained for a much longer period; that the ammunition was becoming scarce and difficult of supply, the vessels shaken by the constant concussion, and the men fagged out with the continued bombardment, which had already lasted for more than six days and seven nights. On these accounts, the flag-officer said he had determined to make the attack the same night.

The attack did not come off on the night of the 22d, for the extraordinary reason that in consequence of the absence of the carpenters' crews of two of the vessels the captains objected to moving without them, and the advance of the fleet was thereby delayed twenty-four hours. That evening Farragut came on board the Harriet Lane and expressed to Porter his mortification at the delay after he had appointed the time to move. The vessels waited for the signal, in some cases the men remaining on deck, but the signal was not made. The attack thus postponed was fixed for the following night.

On Wednesday, the 23d, Farragut was again on board the Harriet Lane in conference with Porter, and Porter again urged that nothing should delay the attack. By this time the officers and men of the mortar-flotilla were nearly exhausted. The bombardment had begun on the morning of the previous Thursday, and had been continued without interruption except during one or two nights and for a few hours in the daytime. All this time the schooners had been under fire and several of them had been hit and one of them sunk. On the day before, the fire from the forts on the head of the first division had been peculiarly rapid and troublesome, the shots falling close to the vessels. The officers and men had had but

little rest. The mortar practise was a severe strain from the violence and frequency of the concussions, while to this was added the constant bursting of shells around and above the schooners and the crashing of shot and shell through the woods. As with everything else, the men became more or less used to it, and Porter says:

I have seen the commanders and crews, overcome with fatigue, lying fast asleep on deck with a mortar on board the vessel next to them thundering away and shaking everything around them like an earthquake.

There is not much doubt, therefore, that Farragut and Porter were right, on the 23d, in the opinion that the attack should be made that night, as otherwise there would have been neither ammunition for the mortars nor physical strength in the crews to perform the important work of cooperating with the fleet at the time of its passage.

The attack was set for two o'clock on the morning of Thursday, April 24th. Farragut's original plan, as shown in the diagram attached to the General Order, had been for the fleet to move in two columns abreast, Bailey, the second in command, leading the right column in the gunboat Cayuga and himself leading the left in the Hartford. The formation in double column was, however, abandoned, owing to the difficulties that might be experienced by the two columns in moving up side by side under fire against the strong current and through the narrow opening in the obstructions, where the lines might be thrown into confusion. Farragut therefore decided to form the ships in single column in line ahead, in which formation his own ship would naturally have taken the leading place; but owing to the solicitations of his officers, who were unwilling that the flag-ship should be so exposed, Farragut permitted Bailey's column to go first, following



with the remainder of the fleet. The position of the Hartford, therefore, in the action was that of the ninth vessel from the head, or about in the center of the line, the entire column being arranged as follows:

*First Division.*—Captain T. Bailey. Cayuga, Lieutenant N. B. Harrison; Pensacola, Captain Henry W. Morris; Mississippi, Captain M. Smith; Oneida, Commander S. Phillips Lee; Varuna, Commander Charles S. Boggs; Katakhdin, Lieutenant George H. Preble; Kineo, Lieutenant George M. Ransom; Wissahickon, Lieutenant A. N. Smith.

*Center.*—Flag-Officer Farragut. Hartford, Commander Richard Wainwright; Brooklyn, Captain Thomas T. Craven; Richmond, Commander James Alden.

*Third Division.*—Captain Henry H. Bell. Sciota, Lieutenant Edward Donaldson; Iroquois, Commander John De Camp; Kennebec, Lieutenant John H. Russell; Pinola, Lieutenant Pierce Crosby; Itasca, Lieutenant C. H. B. Caldwell; Winona, Lieutenant Edward T. Nichols.

While the ships named advanced in their order to pass the forts—or to maintain a protracted attack until the forts were reduced, if the flag-officer so signaled—the remainder, comprising the mortar-flotilla, were to remain below the obstructions and engage Fort Jackson, “to take the enemy in flank,” as Farragut expressed it, or, as Bailey put it, “to cover the advance.” They were not to attempt the passage, but to take a position as advantageous as possible, to accomplish one specific result, namely, to neutralize the lower and heavier of the two forts during the passage of the advancing fleet, leaving the latter to devote its special attention to the more distant and more vulnerable of the defenses, Fort St. Philip. In this way the attacking force was divided into two distinct parts, one of which was to engage in a stationary conflict, while the object of the other was to rush by with as little delay



**FIRST DIVISION—Leading under command of Captain Theodorus Bailey.**

1. Cayuga, Flag-Gunboat, Lieut.-Com. Harrison.
2. Pensacola, Captain H. W. Morris.
3. Mississippi, Captain M. Smith.
4. Oneida, Commander S. P. Lee.
5. Varuna, Commander C. S. Boggs.
6. Katahdin, Lieut.-Com. G. H. Preble.
7. Kineo, Lieut.-Com. Ransom.
8. Wissahickon, Lieut.-Com. A. N. Smith.

**CENTER DIVISION—Admiral Farragut.**

9. Hartford, Commander Wainwright.
10. Brooklyn, Captain T. T. Craven.
11. Richmond, Commander J. Alden.

**THIRD DIVISION—Captain H. H. Bell.**

12. Sciota, Lieut.-Com. Edward Donaldson.
13. Iroquois, Com. John De Camp.
14. Kennebec, Lieut.-Com. John H. Russell.
15. Pinola, Lieut.-Com. P. Crosby.
16. Itasca, Lieut.-Com. C. H. B. Caldwell.
17. Winona, Lieut.-Com. E. T. Nichols.
18. COMMANDER PORTER'S GUNBOATS.
19. Sloop Portsmouth, Commander S. Swartwout

Passage of Forts Jackson and St. Philip, April 24, 1862.  
Order of attack.



and damage as possible. For the purpose of the stationary attack the vessels available were the following:

*Mortar-Flotilla*.—Commander D. D. Porter. Harriet Lane, Lieutenant Jonathan M. Wainwright; Westfield, Commander W. B. Renshaw; Owasco, Lieutenant John Guest; Clifton, Lieutenant Charles H. Baldwin; Miami, Lieutenant A. D. Harrell; Jackson, Lieutenant Selim E. Woodworth; first division of schooners, Lieutenant Watson Smith; second division of schooners, Lieutenant Walter W. Queen; third division of schooners, Lieutenant K. Randolph Breese; to which must be added the sailing sloop-of-war Portsmouth, Commander S. Swartwout;

carrying a total armament of nineteen 13-inch mortars, eighty guns, and nine howitzers, or one hundred and eight pieces in all.<sup>1</sup> Farragut carried his separation of the work of the two forces so far as to direct Bailey, commanding the van division, to disregard the lower fort altogether and confine his efforts solely to Fort St. Philip, feeling sure that Porter's attack would so disturb the fire of Fort Jackson as to insure its safe passage by the fleet. In this he was not mistaken. As far as regards its actual share in the obstruction of Farragut's advance Fort Jackson was largely taken out of the battle, and the work of opposing the passage was thrown on its much less formidable neighbor.

It was about half past three in the morning when Captain Robertson, of the First Louisiana Artillery, commanding the water-battery at Fort Jackson, was called by his sergeant, who pointed out to him two or three black, shapeless masses, barely distinguishable from the surrounding darkness, moving slowly and stealthily past the fort and up the river. Not a light was visible. As

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<sup>1</sup> Or seventy, omitting the 32-pounders on the mortar-schooners.

soon as Robertson caught sight of the moving objects he knew that they were the leading vessels of the Union fleet, and he ordered the guns to be trained upon them. A small gunboat at night is not an easy target to hit, but the guns were sighted and the water-battery opened fire. Presently from the batteries of both forts there broke out what seemed to be continuous sheets of flame, followed by a deafening uproar. Steadily Bailey proceeded on his way in the Cayuga, followed by three of the heavier ships, the Pensacola, the Mississippi, and the Oneida. In pursuance of the prearranged plan, that Bailey's attack should be directed on Fort St. Philip, little attention was paid by the van division to Fort Jackson. The Cayuga opened on Fort St. Philip; the Pensacola directed her fire to the same object. The Oneida did not fire her port battery during the battle, and on board the Varuna the order to work both sides was not given until she was above the forts in the midst of the enemy's fleet. The strength of this division lay in its two heaviest ships, the Pensacola and the Mississippi, which got fairly by Fort Jackson and paused in front of Fort St. Philip, where their crushing broadsides kept down the enemy's fire and enabled the five remaining vessels of the van—the Oneida, the Varuna, and the three gunboats—to pass up without serious loss.

The first exchange of shots with the advancing fleet was the signal for the mortars to open a terrific bombardment of Fort Jackson. Its commander, Colonel Higgins, said in his report, "The mortar-fire was increased to an intensity of fury which had not been previously reached." At the same time the steamers of the flotilla gallantly advanced in column, Porter leading in the Harriet Lane, followed by the Westfield, Owasco, Clifton, and Miami, until they reached a position five hundred yards from the water-

battery of Fort Jackson—a position which it seemed the veriest madness to assume, and which by daylight and under ordinary circumstances they could not have maintained for five minutes without being blown to atoms. Here, with splendid steadiness, they remained, pouring in shell and shrapnel at short range till the end of the battle. Rarely has a fortification been exposed to such a stupendous fire. During the time that the engagement lasted over six hundred projectiles, or about ten a minute, mostly of the heaviest caliber and accurately aimed, were poured into Fort Jackson, with the result that it inflicted no substantial injury on the advancing fleet.

The separate battle of the mortar-flotilla with Fort Jackson greatly simplified the problem of the passage of the forts. The lower fort was the one whose encounter was most to be dreaded. This being so far eliminated, the heavy vessels in the center, with their powerful broadsides, could slow down alongside the upper fort, and by a single discharge of grape and shrapnel scatter the gunners. These could not stand for an instant in the exposed barbettes under such a fire, and with several ships passing in rapid succession the repeated broadsides told with cumulative effect.

Such, however, is the importance of the casual element in all naval encounters that the passage of the fleet was not without narrow escapes. Following and partly lapping the last gunboat of the van division came Farragut in the Hartford, with the Brooklyn and the Richmond next astern. These three vessels made the most powerful group in the attacking fleet. By this time the river, which had before been dark except for the flashes of the guns, was brightly lighted by burning fire-rafts, and except for the clouds of smoke everything was

as plainly visible as by daylight. The Hartford was now approaching Fort St. Philip. At this point a fire-raft, blazing from end to end, drifted near the flag-ship, and was skilfully pushed against her side by a Confederate tug, the Mosher. She sheered off to avoid the raft, and in so doing ran aground, where she took fire. The flames could be seen on her hull and running up the rigging on the tarred ropes to the masthead. It was a critical moment, for the flag-officer, with more than half his force, lay directly in front of Fort Jackson and within easy range of St. Philip; but the only guns in St. Philip that would bear on the ship were disabled, and Jackson was too much occupied with shells exploding at the rate of ten a minute to make effective gun practise. So the Hartford got off with little damage; the ship was backed off the shoal, the flames were extinguished, and after giving the fort two or three broadsides she passed into the safe water above.

The Brooklyn, too, had an adventurous passage, and her casualties were almost the heaviest in the fleet. Upon observing the critical situation of the Hartford, Captain Craven, unwilling to leave the flag-officer behind, dropped down the stream and remained under the fire of Fort Jackson until Farragut got off. It was an anxious period. According to Admiral Bartlett, who was a midshipman on board, if the fire of Fort Jackson had not been so wild, the Brooklyn "would have been blown out of the water." At length the flag-ship started, and the Brooklyn followed, passing close to Fort St. Philip. Here she faced a new danger. Above the upper fort lay the iron-clad Louisiana, with her tremendous battery—motionless, but invulnerable to the Brooklyn's broadsides. The Confederate ship, however, was able to send a 9-inch shell a distance of three feet into the bow of the Brooklyn just



at the water-line, where it failed to burst. When it was afterward taken out it was found that the gunners had neglected to cut the patch from the fuse. Had the shell exploded, the Brooklyn would have gone to the bottom. Above the forts the Confederate ram *Manassas* encountered her and drove a hole in her side just abreast of a full coal-bunker, which alone prevented the blow from having a fatal effect. So narrow is the margin of safety in naval war and such are the elements, whether of chance or design, upon which may depend the issue of success or disaster.

Of the other ships in the center and rear the *Richmond* passed the forts almost uninjured. On the other hand, the *Iroquois* had the largest list of casualties in proportion to her size of any vessel of the fleet—actually larger, in fact, than any other vessel except the *Brooklyn* and *Pensacola*. But all these casualties—and here lies the important fact in the study of this battle—were sustained either from Fort St. Philip or from the force afloat. Following the *Iroquois* came the four gunboats that brought up the rear. Of these, only the *Pinola* succeeded in getting through, being punished more severely in her passage than any other gunboat, but here, again, the injuries were almost wholly inflicted by Fort St. Philip. The *Itasca*, commanded by Caldwell, who had so gallantly cut through the barrier three nights before, received a shot in her boiler which disabled her, and all that she could do was to drift down the river, the *Owasco* going to her assistance. The *Kennebec* and *Winona*, mistaking their course, became entangled in the obstructions, and when daylight broke and all the heavy ships had passed they were still struggling to breast the current, and found themselves a target for the concentrated fire of the enemy, to which they could make but little reply. Abandoning

the attempt to pass up, they wisely withdrew from the line of fire.

Above the forts a short but spirited conflict took place with the Confederate flotilla. The Louisiana, lying immovable, did little actual injury, though she narrowly missed sinking the Brooklyn; but, on the other hand, the shot from Farragut's ships rebounded harmlessly from her armored sides. The Manassas, after ramming the Brooklyn, encountered the Mississippi, whose fire drove her to take refuge on the bank, where her crew abandoned her. The Varuna, meeting the enemy's fleet almost alone—for the Cayuga had passed ahead unobserved—fought a gallant battle, and under the stress of Kenyon's dashing onslaught in the Governor Moore, was sunk in the *mêlée*, the only one of Farragut's vessels that was lost. A moment later, and just in time to rescue the Varuna's sinking crew, came the Oneida, followed by the Pensacola and more gunboats; then came the Hartford, the Brooklyn, the Richmond, and the rest of the fleet. Each, as she drew up beyond the fire of Fort St. Philip, poured broadsides of shot and shell at close range among the Confederate gunboats, and the river steamers that in large part composed it were sunk, burned, or run ashore. But the powerful Louisiana, the McRae, and the Defiance survived the battle, and remained uninjured under the forts below.

During the advance of the fleet and until all of Farragut's ships, except the three that withdrew, had passed, the incessant fire of the mortar-flotilla, both from the schooners and the steamers, continued to rain their shells upon Fort Jackson. Porter had taken a position so close inshore, nearer than the enemy supposed, that the latter's gunners were confused, and most of the projectiles passed harmlessly over the steamers. One shot from the

fort struck Porter's vessel, the *Harriet Lane*, which was nearest to the enemy, and carried away one of the stanchions and a portion of the railing of the bridge between the wheel-houses, the fragments of which killed one man and seriously wounded another stationed at the 9-inch gun on the quarter-deck. The other ships were untouched. All the captains kept their vessels close up, firing accurately and rapidly, until the last of the advancing fleet had disappeared in the smoke, and the distant booming of their guns could be heard up the river above the forts. Then only did Porter give the signal by rockets to the mortar-schooners to cease firing, and the steamers were withdrawn, the purpose of the attack having been accomplished.

Captain Robertson, who commanded the water-battery at Fort Jackson, in a subsequent account of the battle says that "as soon as it was light enough to see them plainly we silenced and drove rapidly down the river all the vessels, including Admiral Porter's, that remained below the forts." This remark must be received with the indulgence which it is merciful to give to the statements of the vanquished. Captain Robertson might have said with equal propriety that they had silenced and driven Farragut's fleet rapidly up the river. In fact, he adds, apparently with this idea, "as soon as Farragut's vessels could they pushed up the river out of our range." Had the gallant artillery captain studied the plan of the battle he would have seen that it was never the intention of Farragut to linger, and it certainly could not be within the purposes of Porter to keep his half-dozen pasteboard gunboats, after daylight broke and the fleet had passed, close under the seventy-three heavy guns of Fort Jackson.

The object which Porter had sought to effect—so to divert and occupy the attention of Fort Jackson that the

fleet could pass it without serious loss, and thus remove the main element of danger and obstruction to Farragut's advance—he had accomplished with a daring and resolution of purpose, a brilliancy and finish of execution, that placed his exploit among the most signal and successful of that memorable night. Even Captain Robertson says in the same account that we have quoted, "Porter and his mortar-fleet did splendid work, and contributed materially to the success which the Federal navy achieved over us." Colonel Higgins, who commanded both forts, but who remained at Fort Jackson because it was the more closely pressed, said in a letter to Porter written a few years after the war: "When the fleet passed, the terrible precision with which your formidable vessels hailed down their tons of bursting shell upon the devoted fort made it impossible for us to obtain either rapidity or accuracy of fire, and this rendered the passage of the fleet comparatively easy." Still more striking is the evidence drawn from the actual experience of the fleet. We have seen that Bailey's division, in accordance with Farragut's orders, paid little or no attention to Fort Jackson. But this is not all. Among the shots received by Farragut's ships by far the largest proportion were from the starboard side. In the Hartford and Brooklyn they were double those from the port side. The Katahdin was under a heavy fire from both forts, but the only hits were from Fort St. Philip. In the little Pinola, which was the most badly cut up of the gunboats, out of fourteen hull shots, twelve were from starboard and only two from port. Of the Iroquois, whose list of casualties was among the heaviest, her captain, De Camp, reported: "We suffered severely from the raking cross-fire of Fort St. Philip, but Fort Jackson inflicted no injury, although we passed within fifty yards of its guns." The Richmond had a

somewhat similar experience. When it is remembered that Fort Jackson was half as powerful again as Fort St. Philip, and that it should have done a proportionately greater damage to the fleet, the importance of Porter's share in the battle may be fairly appreciated.

It was now morning, and Porter, notwithstanding the continuous mental and physical strain which he had undergone for the past ten days and nights, was still ready to play the game as keenly and as vigorously as ever. The main body of the fleet had gone up the river, where it was now resting from its labors. The forts had apparently suffered no irreparable injury. Above them and sheltered by their guns was a naval force of the enemy which had survived the battle, but of the exact extent and character of which Porter was unaware. He knew, because he could see, that it included the ironclad *Louisiana*, a casemated vessel more formidable than the *Merrimac*, which could have disposed of the whole flotilla with far greater ease than that with which the *Merrimac* had disposed of the *Congress* and the *Cumberland* six weeks before in Hampton Roads. Of the defects of her motive power Porter was ignorant. He could see also that she had with her four consorts, the *McRae*, the second largest of the Confederate fleet, the ram *Defiance*, and two others, the *Landis* and *Burton*, which, though Porter did not know it, were unarmed tenders of the *Louisiana*. He had therefore serious reason to be concerned for the safety of his force, which in case of a naval attack by the enemy could only be saved by desperate measures. For these and any other measures that might become necessary Porter was fully prepared; but he was well aware of their desperate character.

Had the presence of the *Louisiana* and her tremendous offensive and defensive strength been known the

strategic question presented on the eve of the battle might have assumed a different aspect. Any commander, however bold, might well have hesitated to take his fleet up the river, leaving such a formidable enemy afloat in his rear. Of course Farragut, when he passed the forts, did not foresee such an eventuality. Not only was the flotilla apparently doomed, but the position of the fleet itself became most precarious. Had the Louisiana, with her armament and armor, been properly manned, equipped, and propelled so as to equal or exceed in speed Farragut's ships, nothing but a miracle would have saved him from serious loss.

Farragut apparently knew little of her strength or weakness, for in his first hurried despatch after the battle he speaks of her as a ram, and says he had sent the Mississippi down to "look after her." If she had had her motive power, she would have made short work of the wooden side-wheeler.

Porter, on the other hand, knew well her strength, though he also was ignorant of her defects. He was further deceived by the fact that she was able to shift her position on the morning after the battle. She was therefore the predominant factor in the situation, as it appeared to him below the forts; and in moderate but plain language he so expressed himself in his preliminary report to the department. He says:

The matter of the floating battery becomes a very serious affair, as they are hard at work at Fort Jackson mounting heavy rifled guns on it which are of no further use to them in the fort. She mounts sixteen guns, is almost as formidable a vessel as the Merrimac, perfectly shot-proof, and has four powerful engines in her. I shall, at all events, take such steps as will prevent her from destroying anything, and we may still hold her in check with the steamers, though



they are rather fragile for such a service. This is one of the ill effects of leaving an enemy in the rear. I suppose that the ships fired on her as they passed through, but that her mail resisted the shot.

Fortunately for the "rather fragile" steamers, they never had to fight the *Louisiana*. That Porter should have contemplated such a thing shows to what desperate straits an attack of the ironclad would have reduced him. *Farragut* had weighed the ill effects of leaving an enemy in the rear, but he had never included in his calculations an enemy afloat of tremendous power such as the *Louisiana* now appeared. As the result turned out, it was well that he did not, for the failure of the vessel's propellers made her, in reality, comparatively harmless.

As to the enemy's force on shore, the question was quite different. As to this, one thing Porter knew, or at least could infer, that the terrific and incessant bombardment of the last six days had thoroughly demoralized the garrison of Fort Jackson, and that the possibility of its renewal could only be regarded with dread. The casemates, though badly damaged, had not been destroyed, the batteries had not been disabled, and the garrison had sustained the attack and had stood to their guns with extraordinary courage and fortitude; but there are limits to human endurance, and the shock of two exploding 13-inch shells a minute, continued for hour after hour, with little intermission during a whole week, comes perilously close to the limit. As having it in his power, or as being supposed to have it in his power—which for practical purposes was nearly the same thing—to renew the bombardment, he held the key to the situation unless the enemy's force afloat could wrest it from him. As to this, the chances seemed altogether against him, but he could calmly wait for a demonstration that would develop



the strength of this force, and meantime he must appear to dominate the situation, even if it required something in the nature of a "bluff" to do it.

Accordingly, at half past nine on the morning of the 24th, only three or four hours after the fleet had passed, and when it had barely finished the running fight with the flotilla above, he sent the *Owasco*, under Guest, to demand the surrender of the forts under penalty of renewing the bombardment. ; The gunboat was under a flag of truce, which was fired on, but this, as Porter says in his report, "was apologized for afterward." Presently a flag-of-truce boat came from the fort and received Porter's demand for surrender, returning after a time with a message from General Duncan, commanding the defenses, that the proposition was inadmissible. Thereupon the bombardment was reopened and continued, according to General Duncan, until near sundown, "to let them know," as Porter said, "that we were still taking care of them." Again Fort Jackson was the mark for Porter's fire, still as always with the idea that in this way he would impress more and more upon its garrison the strain and demoralization to which they had already been subjected, and by this means secure the reduction of both forts. "It was from Fort St. Philip that our ships suffered most," he says in his report, "the men and officers there having had comparatively an easy time of it. I felt sure that St. Philip would surrender the moment Jackson hauled down the secession flag, and consequently directed all the attention of the mortar-schooners to the latter fort." In this he was right. It was from the garrison of Jackson, and of Jackson alone, that the surrender came; and when it fell, St. Philip fell with it.

No reply was made by the fort to the bombardment of the mortar-vessels on the afternoon of Thursday, the

24th. As Porter said in his report of the 30th: "The fight had all been taken out of them." Oddly enough, in his report written on the same day, General Duncan uses the same expression in speaking of his garrison: "It was soon evident that there was no further fight in the men remaining behind." Under these circumstances, Porter, than whom no one ever gaged more accurately the effect of morale on a fighting force, determined to leave them undisturbed for a day or two, which gave the seeds of demoralization a chance to work. Although the garrison had until then, as General Duncan says, been "cheerful, confident, and courageous, . . . a reaction set in among them during the lull of the 25th, 26th, and 27th, when there was no other excitement to arouse them than the fatigue duty of repairing our damages." We shall presently see how Porter's policy of letting them alone produced the desired result.

In spite of his active measures, Porter at the close of his supplementary bombardment was not sanguine as to the result. Having in mind the presence of the *Louisiana*, which could, as it appeared, effectually check any operation of the flotilla against the forts, he urged Farragut to send some of his vessels to attack her, and thus "open the way down." He thought the capture of the forts still presented a problem of great difficulty, and on the 25th he so represented the situation both to Farragut and the department, with a view to securing beforehand the adoption of every possible measure to insure a result of such overwhelming importance. He even suggested to the department to send down some ironclads from the East. Had he known the actual state of the case he would perhaps have modified his suggestions; but he believed always in preparation. As it was, Farragut was fully occupied at New Orleans, and

long before the department received Porter's despatch the forts had fallen.

Although the mortar-flotilla desisted from bombardment, Porter was by no means idle. A portion of the schooners were sent below to refit and prepare for sea as well as to take a position of greater security. Several were moved to the network of waterways in the rear of Fort Jackson, to blockade the bayous on that side, and to prevent the introduction of supplies. The Miami took General Butler and his staff to Pilot Town to procure launches for bayou transportation. Thence she went around outside to the rear of Fort St. Philip and took on board a regiment of Butler's force, which she landed near Quarantine, on the left bank of the river above the forts. The Sachem was also sent to assist in this duty, all of which was so efficiently performed that by Saturday, the 26th, the people in the forts found the lines gradually drawing around them by movements which they could see but were powerless to prevent. Meanwhile Porter with his remaining gunboats was engaged in patrolling the river, clearing it of boats by which information could be given to the enemy, and assisting the movements of the army, but above all keeping a close watch upon the enemy's fleet lying under the forts. Each day the gunboats, or some of them, took up a position below Fort Jackson, where they could both see and be seen. So matters remained for two days.

On Sunday, the 27th, Porter again sent the Owasco under a flag of truce to Fort Jackson, with a renewal of his demand for surrender, this time proposing to permit the officers and men to withdraw under parole, the officers retaining their side-arms. Again the demand was refused. During the following night, however, the garrison of Fort Jackson, which had hitherto fought so gal-

lantly, broke out into open mutiny, seized the guard and posterns, reversed the field-pieces commanding the gates and began spiking the guns, and fired from the ramparts upon the officers who were trying to stop them. For two days they had been planning a revolt, and General Duncan decided as the only possible course to let those go who wished. Half the garrison departed at once, "among them many of the men," says Duncan, "who had stood last and best to their guns throughout the protracted bombardment." Those who remained had no further power of resistance; "they were completely demoralized."

Under these circumstances the defense instantly collapsed. There were no signs of insubordination among the garrison of Fort St. Philip,<sup>1</sup> but the surrender of Jackson meant the surrender of both. Early on the morning of Monday, the 28th, General Duncan sent a flag of truce on board the *Harriet Lane*, offering to surrender on the terms which had been rejected the day before. Porter promptly sent a boat for General Duncan and Colonel Higgins, and moved up in the *Harriet Lane*, with the *Westfield*, *Winona*, and *Kennebec* in company, to a point close to Fort Jackson. The Confederate officers presently came on board, and articles of capitulation were drawn up and signed in the cabin of the *Harriet Lane* by which the forts were surrendered to the mortar-flotilla.

Porter's demand had expressly included the Confederate vessels, but General Duncan was unable to comply with it in this respect, as he had no control over them. He had had a violent controversy just before the battle with Commander Mitchell, who was in command of the forces afloat, and the controversy was still acute. Mitchell was still asserting his independence, and al-

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<sup>1</sup> Duncan's report, War Records, Army, vii, 532.

though within his technical rights on that point, he was, in a belligerent sense, a mere appendage of the forts, under whose guns he lay helpless, and as such could not properly refuse to join in the capitulation. His subsequent conduct certainly does not admit of justification. Finding that the forts were about to surrender, he set fire to the *Louisiana*, then in her berth above Fort St. Philip. At this moment the four gunboats were lying opposite Fort Jackson, a few yards apart, all with flags of truce flying at the fore, while similar flags were displayed from the yards of the flagstaffs at both forts. As the fire speedily burned the hemp cables by which the *Louisiana* was tied up to the bank, she drifted out and down the stream toward the gunboats, her guns loaded, and her powder still in the magazine. The probable result was not difficult to foresee, and in fact was foreseen by Mitchell, for he considerably sent one of his officers, Lieutenant Whittle, in a boat to give Porter the agreeable intelligence. Whittle says that Commander Mitchell directed him to say to Porter, "with his compliments, that he had fired the *Louisiana* and drowned, as far as he could, the magazines and charges in the guns, but that she was secured to the bank with rope fasts, which might burn, and as he was indisposed to do him any damage while under a flag of truce, in answer to a similar flag from the forts, he notified him in case his burning ship should drift down among his fleet."

This amazing message was not delivered on board the *Harriet Lane* until after the *Louisiana* blew up. According to General Duncan's official report: "While negotiations were pending on the *Harriet Lane* it was reported that the steamer *Louisiana*, with her guns protruding, and on fire, was drifting down the river toward the fleet. As the wreck in descending kept close in to

the Fort St. Philip shore, the chances were taken by the enemy without changing the position of his boats. The guns of the Louisiana were discharged at random as she floated down, and the boat finally blew up near Fort St. Philip, scattering its fragments everywhere within and around the fort, killing one of our men and wounding three or four others."

From this statement of General Duncan it appears that Mitchell drowned neither his guns nor his magazine. From the statement of Whittle, it is clear not only that the burning of the Louisiana was likely to inflict injury on the flotilla while the flag of truce was flying, but that the officer who was responsible for the act foresaw the probable result. The message, even if it had been delivered before the explosion, could not relieve the act of its odium; delivered afterward, as it was, it partook of the character of *opéra bouffe*. If under similar conditions—namely, the presence of vessels of an opposing belligerent within the line of fire of forts, while both sides were flying flags of truce and negotiations for a capitulation were in progress—the commanding officer afloat under the protection of the forts should set in motion the mechanism to fire a torpedo under the vessels so present, he could hardly justify the act by informing the opposing commanding officer, with his compliments, that in another minute his ship would be blown to atoms. Nor if the explosion took place, would much indulgence be given to a statement that he had made unsuccessful efforts to prevent it.

The fact is that Mitchell's act was one of the most unpardonable in the history of naval wars. The only salvation of the flotilla was that the magazine exploded before the Louisiana reached it. When her approach was reported Porter asked Duncan and Higgins whether



her guns were loaded, and how much powder she had on board, but they were unable to give him any information, either pleasant or unpleasant, on the subject. Porter ordered the word passed to the vessels on each side to veer to the end of their chains, and to be ready by using steam to sheer out of the way of the Louisiana, if necessary, but not to leave their anchorage. He then remarked to the Confederate officers that the act was a piece of sharp practise, but that he could stand it if they could, and went on with the capitulation, which was signed by Porter, Renshaw, and Wainwright on the part of the United States, and Duncan and Higgins on the part of the Confederates. Presently the Louisiana blew up with a loud explosion, near Fort St. Philip, and sank immediately in the deep water of the river. Ten minutes later the Confederate officers had left the ships. Renshaw was sent in the Westfield to Fort Jackson, and Nichols in the Winona to Fort St. Philip to receive the surrender, and the national flag, after a disappearance of more than a year, was again hoisted on the forts.

Porter restrained his wrath while the discussion was going on in his cabin, but the moment General Duncan left the Harriet Lane he gave orders to weigh and beat to quarters. Then he steered straight for the vessel carrying Mitchell's flag and opened fire upon her. His first gun was no sooner discharged than down came the flag. When Wainwright went on board to take possession Mitchell demanded the same terms that had been given to the forts, but his demand was summarily refused, and he and his officers were placed in close confinement. They were afterward sent to Fort Warren, and finally placed on the ordinary footing of prisoners of war. If the Government had had before it the evidence contained in the statements of General Duncan



and Lieutenant Whittle it is difficult to see how Mitchell could have escaped the penalty of his gross violation of the laws of war.

Of Mitchell's force, the *McRae*, by Farragut's permission, had been sent to New Orleans two days before with the wounded from the forts. The *Louisiana's* machinery, upon which the mechanics had been working since her arrival at the forts a week before, was reported ready that morning, just before Mitchell gave the order for her destruction. A day's delay in the surrender of the forts would have enabled her to escape—for the flotilla certainly could not have stopped her—and an engagement with her would have been attended with serious loss. The events that caused the surrender of the forts at that time therefore equally prevented the escape of the *Louisiana*. The *Defiance* shared her fate, being scuttled by Mitchell on the morning of the capitulation. There remained only the *Louisiana's* tenders, the *Burton* and *Landis*, whose surrender wiped out the last vestige of Confederate authority on the lower Mississippi. Porter turned the forts over to the army, and after making a careful examination with the officers of the Coast Survey of the effects of the week's mortar practise on Fort Jackson, proceeded to join Farragut at New Orleans.

In determining the precise share of Porter in the victory at New Orleans, the examination of the question is much aided by the fact that to Porter, and to him alone, was due the existence of the mortar-flotilla; that he originated it, prepared it, commanded it, and fought it, so that it stands out as his individual creation from beginning to end. His personal stamp upon it is all the more marked by the fact that Mr. Welles afterward contemptuously disclaimed any responsibility for it in the Navy

Department, and Farragut had stated that he did not need the mortar-vessels, but "as the department seemed to think they were indispensable," he made no further objection. That the department should have insisted on them against the opinion of the commander-in-chief is only explained by its deference to the opinion of Porter; there was certainly no other reason why they should have been employed against the wishes of Welles, and without encouragement by Farragut, especially when, according to the Secretary, they were a great source of delay.

The question of delay is quite distinct from that of the efficiency of the mortar-flotilla for the work for which Porter intended it. Of course, if time were the main object, and if the attack would be fatally delayed by the preparation of the flotilla, it would have been instantly discarded, however great its supposed usefulness. But as the Navy Department had waited seven months before lifting a finger to attack New Orleans, it did not seem to regard time as a very essential element in its calculations. It was profoundly ignorant of the preparations, whatever they were, that were in progress at the two forts. Finally, it evidently did not think that the mortar-flotilla would unduly delay the expedition, for it adopted the flotilla at Porter's suggestion as part of its program, and that, too, though Farragut did not seem to require it.

The whole question of delay, however, is disposed of by one simple fact: that the flotilla was not a source of delay. It arrived in the Mississippi on the 18th of March, and was ready for immediate action. The fleet, however, was not ready. The ships had not crossed the bar, and two of the most important, the Pensacola and Mississippi, did not cross till the 8th of April; and they would not have got across at all but for the efforts of Porter and the steamers of the flotilla. Even then the fleet was not

ready, as it still lacked its indispensable ordnance stores, hospital stores, and coal. About the time that the coal arrived the bombardment was begun. The other stores for the fleet, including the required projectiles, actually did not arrive until the mortar bombardment was nearly concluded. The question of delay does not therefore enter into consideration.

Nevertheless, historians and biographers have gravely represented that Farragut's patience was severely tried by the delay imposed upon him by the bombardment. This is clearly an error. In a private letter written by Farragut on the 21st, and published by his son, the flag-officer says:

We have been bombarding the forts for three or four days, but the current is running so strong that we can not stem it sufficiently to do anything with our ships, so that I am now waiting a change of wind, which brings a slacker tide, and we shall be enabled to run up.

We had a deserter from the fort yesterday, who says the mortars and shells have done great damage. . . . Captain Bell went last night to cut the chain across the river. I never felt such anxiety in my life as I did until his return. One of his vessels got on shore, and I was fearful she would be captured. They kept up a tremendous fire on him; but Porter diverted their fire with a heavy cannonade.

On the same day (the 21st) he reported to the department:

We commenced the bombardment of Fort Jackson on the 16th, which was the earliest day possible after the arrival of coal. On the first day the citadel was set on fire, and burned until two o'clock the next morning. On the 17th we made but little apparent impression on the fort. On the 18th we dismounted one of their heavy columbiads and otherwise appeared to damage them and drove the men

from the parapet guns, so that they only appeared occasionally when the gunboats took part in the bombardment to draw the fire from the bomb-vessels. On the 19th a deserter came to us from the fort.<sup>1</sup> . . . The wind was blowing from the northwest and chilly, the current running with great strength, so that the ships when under way could scarcely stem it, so that I shall await a change of wind and a consequent less violent current before I attack the forts, as I find great difficulty in avoiding collisions among vessels.

In this remarkable letter Farragut goes on to say :

In conclusion, I regret to say that the fleet is in want of all the essentials to carry on our work—shells, fuses, serge and yarn to make cartridge-bags, grape and canister shot, for all of which I made large requisitions, and the articles may be on their way out.

The medical department is miserably supplied. . . . But justice to myself requires me to say that I required all these supplies some time before I left Hampton Roads, and others immediately on my arrival at Key West or Ship Island. . . .

My coal arrived just in time.

When it is remembered that the bombardment began on the 18th, and that this letter was written on the 21st, that the projectiles and other ordnance stores did not arrive until after the letter was written, and that the passage of the forts was delayed from the 22d to the 23d

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<sup>1</sup> The dates here are confused. The bombardment began, not on the 16th, but the 18th, on which day the citadel was burned. On the 19th, the second day, two columbiads were disabled as well as one 32-pounder, one 24-pounder, and one mortar in the main work, and two rifled 32-pounders in the water-battery. On the 20th, the third day, the deserter came, and Bell and Caldwell cut the chain. Farragut was writing on the 21st. The second day mentioned in his report as the 17th, in which no "apparent impression" was made, was literally a *dies non*, which explains why the flag-officer could not recall the events of it.

owing to the absence of the carpenters' gangs from two of the ships, the wildest flight of imagination could not conceive that "Farragut's patience was sorely tried by the delay imposed by the bombardment."

Equally ridiculous is the suggestion that the bombardment gave the enemy "long warning" of the attack, thereby enabling them to make their defense more efficient. The warning was given, when on March 27th Colonel Higgins at the forts reported to General Duncan that the ships were crossing the bar and entering the river. "In consequence," says Duncan, "I repaired at once to that post to assume the general command of the threatened attack upon New Orleans." Nothing could be added to that warning during the three following weeks while the ships were struggling to cross the bar and ascending the river and taking on coal and other supplies. The warning given to Fort Jackson by the mortar bombardment after it really began was not of a kind to enable that fort to increase the efficiency of its defenses.

The question of the wisdom of Porter's plan of an auxiliary mortar-flotilla in the expedition to New Orleans is to be determined not by any theoretical or scientific discussion of the value of mortar-fire in general, but by an examination of the precise results accomplished by that "appendage to the squadron," as Mr. Welles calls it, between the 18th and the 28th of April, 1862. It so happened that the situation at the Plaquemine forts, as Porter had discovered, lent itself to the efficient employment of mortars, and it was for that reason that he had recommended them. The wooded point where the river made its sharp bend just below Fort Jackson afforded a natural position where they could be used to the fullest advantage. Here the schooners could be moored in a long line, and with the aid of simple devices could be

rendered invisible. The fort was also invisible, except from the mastheads; but by carefully triangulating positions and fixing distances the aim of the mortars could be reduced practically to certainty. All these precautions were taken by Porter, with his extraordinary thoroughness and painstaking judgment; and in consequence his shells in immense numbers fell within the fort. That the fort was not immediately reduced does not affect the question. Nobody had ever supposed that the forts would be reduced by a mere bombardment; if that had been intended or expected the department would not have fitted out a fleet of seventeen ships for Farragut in addition to the mortar-flotilla, and Farragut would not have waited from the 18th of March, when the mortar-flotilla arrived, until the 18th of April to begin the attack. He would not have waited till April 8th for the *Pensacola* and the *Mississippi* to get over the bar, and he would not have been especially concerned about the delays of the department in sending him his ordnance-stores, hospital stores, and coal. That Porter never regarded the mortar-flotilla as the sole instrument for the reduction of the forts is clearly shown by the famous memorandum, "When the ships are over the bar," which contains no suggestion of such a possibility, and which is the only memorandum of Porter's on the subject. But, although the mortar-flotilla was neither expected nor intended of itself to reduce the forts, it was intended and expected by Porter to produce certain definite results, and it did, in fact, produce them. What these results were may be briefly summed up here.

The first and most important was the neutralization, as it may be termed, of Fort Jackson during the passage of the fleet. By this it is not meant that the fleet was enabled to go by as if there had been nothing on the site



of Fort Jackson, but its fire was so diminished in extent and far more in accuracy that the efficiency of the fort as an element of obstruction was reduced almost to nothing.

A second and highly important result of the cooperation of the mortar-flotilla was that it lessened enormously the efficiency of the *Louisiana*. This vessel was tied up to the bank above Fort St. Philip in a position as ill calculated to enable her to render effective service as any that could have been found. Lovell, Duncan, and Higgins all begged and entreated Mitchell to move her to a position below the forts on the left bank of the river from which she could enfilade the approaching fleet. Mitchell admitted that she ought to be below the forts, and that she would be far more effective there than above. There was no doubt of the fact, and everybody was agreed about it. Nevertheless, Mitchell refused to move. Correspondence and discussion took place on this subject, appeal after appeal was sent to him, but without avail, and the *Louisiana* never was moved. The reason that was given for this refusal was that while the *Louisiana* was heavily protected with armor on her sides, and therefore comparatively invulnerable to horizontal fire, her deck was totally unprotected, and the vertical shell-fire of the mortars would have resulted in her speedy destruction. Upon this point the testimony of the Confederate officers is so strong as to be incontrovertible.

A third result of the presence of the mortar-flotilla was that it gave Farragut an opportunity to conduct a dual engagement, or rather two simultaneous engagements; the first a progressing fight in which the advancing fleet was attacking the enemy's positions in succession, passing the first rapidly, and gradually concentrating its blows with cumulative force on their rear; and



the second a stationary fight in which the mortar-flotilla maintained tenaciously its attack on their front. The fleet was to jump at St. Philip and dash by, the flotilla to get its teeth in at Jackson and hold on.

For this purpose Farragut was fortunate in having in command of the flotilla the one officer in the navy who was best fitted for the work—the man who had created it, who had fitted it out, who understood its capacities, who worked it with the precision of a machine; a man of keen and sober strategic judgment, but at the same time bold and dashing in execution beyond any of his contemporaries—"that brave, resolute, and indefatigable officer," as Bailey generously describes him in his report. The result was that while St. Philip and the Confederate gunboats sustained a terrific battle in which Porter took no part, Jackson sustained a terrific battle in which Farragut and his fleet took a comparatively slight part, the advance division, comprising half the fleet, in fact, taking no part at all; and that when the fleet had reached a position of safety above, and was free to pursue its way to New Orleans, the flotilla, after affording a refuge to the unsuccessful gunboats, and receiving from them an accession of strength, remained below to renew the attack—which it did that afternoon—to serve as a constant menace, to protect and cooperate with the movements of the troops, to demand the surrender, and ultimately to receive it. There was a certain poetic justice in the fact that Porter, who had brought about the expedition and had secured the adoption of the mortar-flotilla as one of its component parts, should himself have received the surrender of the forts; and it was with a pardonable satisfaction that he wrote in the articles of capitulation that "Brigadier-General Duncan and Lieutenant-Colonel Higgins shall

surrender Forts Jackson and St. Philip to the mortar-flotilla."

Finally, a fourth result in the matter of the surrender itself must be traced directly to the flotilla. Neither Duncan nor Higgins was influenced by the fact that New Orleans was under the guns of Farragut's fleet. They meant to hold out as long as they could, but their men forced them to surrender. As Duncan said, there was no further fight left in them; they were completely demoralized. What had brought them to this condition? Was it the fall of the city? No doubt the men pleaded this as one justification; but was it the real cause? If so, it would have influenced the garrison at St. Philip just as much, but that garrison held out to a man; there was not a suggestion of demoralization among them. They were ready to go on fighting even if New Orleans had fallen, yet they were no better than the garrison at Jackson, nor had they the presence of Duncan and Higgins to reassure them. The real reason was that, while the terrific pounding of the last week did not demolish Fort Jackson, it had brought its heroic defenders to the limit of endurance; and when, as they said themselves, "the enemy were about to attack by land and water on three sides at once, a longer defense would prove a butchery." They could not stand the prospect of a recommencement of that relentless shower of shells bursting twice a minute on all sides of them. The garrison at St. Philip was ready to keep up the fight; but that made no difference. It had not been through the bombardment. For themselves they were done with it.

It is for the impartial student of history to determine in the light of all the facts the value of Porter's services in the New Orleans expedition. It is in this spirit that

the effort has been made to present the facts upon which final judgment is to be passed. The brilliancy of Farragut's distinction as the commander-in-chief upon the occasion of this overwhelming victory has somewhat overshadowed the services of his able coadjutor, and it is the object of the foregoing pages to put these services in the proper light. It is not here contended that, with respect to the actual battle, Porter was more than a coadjutor, but his cooperation was a powerful element in determining the result.

We should not expect to find in the statements either of the Secretary of the Navy, who subsequently became his principal detractor, or of Farragut, who, notwithstanding his generous disposition, was not much given to expressions of official commendation, any very significant reference to Porter's share in the engagement. It may be worth while, however, to quote the language that both of them use.

Says Farragut in his general report: "I attacked Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson with my little fleet, while Commander Porter most gallantly bombarded them, and besides took them in the flank with his steamers"; and in his later report: "Captain Porter had by arrangement moved up to a certain point on the Fort Jackson side with his gunboats to engage the water-batteries to the southward and eastward of it, while his mortar-vessels poured a terrific fire of shells into it."

Speaking of the bombardment during Caldwell's chain-cutting expedition, he says: "Commander Porter kept up such a tremendous fire on them from the mortars that the enemy's shot did the gunboats no injury."

The despatch of Secretary Welles to Porter upon the receipt of the news of the victory comments briefly upon Porter's relation to the event. He says:

The important part which you have borne in the organization of the mortar-flotilla and the movement on New Orleans has identified your name with one of the most brilliant naval achievements on record, and to your able assistance with the flotilla is Flag-Officer Farragut much indebted for the successful results he has accomplished.

The main contribution, however, of Porter to the New Orleans expedition was not in the mortar-boats, but in the personality of Porter himself. He it was who first originated the plan. His fire and energy in advocating it swept before them the "speculative and uncertain" cogitations of the Navy Department. He secured its adoption by the President. He formulated its details as it was actually carried out. He made the minute preparations for its execution. He had the largest share in the selection of its commanding officer. He devised and organized the mortar-flotilla and brought its raw officers and crews to the highest state of discipline, efficiency, and self-devotion. He had the flotilla on the spot ready to cooperate a month before the fleet was prepared for action. He it was whose efforts carried the Pensacola, the Mississippi, and the Richmond successfully across the bar. He planned and carried out the reconnaissance upon which the whole operation depended. For a week he directed with untiring energy the work of the bombardment. By the stress of his attack he enabled Caldwell to perform his exploit of breaking through the obstructions without loss. His force, while its allotted task was not to pass above with Farragut, engaged Fort Jackson with consummate gallantry, neutralized its fire, and covered the passage of the fleet. After the passage he renewed the bombardment, provided for the disposition of the troops, and hung upon the enemy until he received the final surrender. For six weeks from his arrival in the Mississippi

until the occupation of the forts his activities were incessant. He was not the commander-in-chief; he did not win the battle; nor is it necessary, in order to point out his services, to detract one iota from the splendor of Farragut's achievement. But impartial history will recognize the fact that in the success of that achievement from the beginning to the end he was a large and important factor.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FIRST ATTEMPT ON VICKSBURG

THE department's famous order to Farragut of January 20, 1862, to the peculiar features of which reference has already been made, contained instructions as to the operations of the fleet after the capture of New Orleans. It stated: "If the Mississippi expedition from Cairo shall not have descended the river, you will take advantage of the panic to push a strong force up the river to take all their defenses in the rear." This order was positive and direct, but it was followed by another, equally direct and equally positive: "You will also reduce the fortifications which defend Mobile Bay and turn them over to the army to hold."

After the capture of New Orleans it was of course not possible to comply with both the orders of the Navy Department at the same time. The campaign against Mobile was one thing, and the advance up the Mississippi was another. Both were of importance. Farragut's own inclination was to attack Mobile first, and he had given Porter to understand that this was his intention. The army, according to Secretary Welles, had all along favored an attack on Mobile and the two forts, Morgan and Gaines, which were situated at the entrance of Mobile Bay. A portion of Farragut's fleet, aided by an inconsiderable detachment of troops, could undoubtedly at this time have captured them with little difficulty. The effect

would have been to convert the blockade at Mobile into an occupation and to have enabled the blockading vessels to close the entrance to the city.

It was apparently with this object in view that Porter was now ordered with the mortar-flotilla to Ship Island, where Farragut, after leaving New Orleans, was shortly to join him. The intention, however, was never carried out. On the 3d of May Porter was at Southwest Pass in the Harriet Lane, whence he proceeded to Ship Island. A day or two later he appeared with a portion of his flotilla of gunboats and mortar-vessels off Fort Morgan, with which he exchanged shots. Bad weather coming on, he headed up for Pensacola, and arrived there on the morning of May 10th. It is a curious fact that Porter, who just a year before had gone down to Pensacola burning with a desire to utilize the Powhatan in an attack upon the navy-yard and the Confederate forts, but had been prevented from doing so by Colonel Brown, should have been, after all, the direct, though unconscious, instrument in bringing about the fall of the city. His demonstration against Fort Morgan was reported to Colonel Jones, the commanding officer at Pensacola, who thereupon concluded that the time had come for the evacuation for which he had been long preparing, made his final dispositions, removed his sick and baggage, marched out his force and set fire to "the public buildings, camp tents, and every other combustible thing from the navy-yard to Fort McRee." When Porter arrived on the morning of the 10th the work of destruction was complete and Pensacola was in the possession of the Union forces.

The history of the operations of the National Government at Pensacola from the first abandonment of the navy-yard in January, 1861, to the recovery of its ruins



in May, 1862, with the exception of the part taken in it by Slemmer and Porter, is one of the most deplorable records of administrative, military, and naval incompetency during the Civil War, only equaled by the corresponding history of the abandonment of Norfolk. The value of the property which the Confederates thus obtained in ordnance and stores of all kinds was inestimable. Preliminary orders to prepare for the evacuation of Pensacola by the Confederates were given on February 27, 1862.<sup>1</sup> From that time the Confederate commander had been removing every article of the slightest value for war purposes in the place, so that at the time of his departure in May there was hardly a pound of junk left within the forts, yards, and storehouses. How this could have been done in the presence, as it were, of the garrison at Fort Pickens and of the vessels which from time to time lay at Pensacola it is difficult to see, but such was the fact, and Colonel Jones only waited for the sighting of a flotilla of mortar-schooners off Fort Morgan to remove the remnant of his garrison and apply the torch to Fort McRee and the storehouses of the navy-yard. Meantime the guns, including many rifle and heavy shell-guns and their ammunition, had gone to strengthen the defenses of New Orleans, Vicksburg, and Mobile.

Although the department in its order of January 20th had directed Farragut to proceed up the Mississippi, and also to take Mobile, the language used seemed to suggest a subordination of the Mobile enterprise to the other. All that was said about Mobile was, "You will also reduce the fortifications which defend Mobile Bay." On the other hand, the order said: "If the Mississippi expedition from Cairo shall not have descended the river, you

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, Army, vi, 835.

will take advantage of the panic to push a strong force up the river to attack all their defenses in the rear." To take advantage of a condition of panic instant action is evidently necessary, and the conditional form of the order further indicated that if the condition was present the order was to be executed.

At this time the Mississippi squadron, or flotilla, or expedition from Cairo, as it was variously called, was an adjunct of the army. Under the command of Foote, the same who had been in charge of the New York Yard when Porter relieved Mercer in the Powhatan, it had conducted a brilliant campaign, which, however, at this date had brought it only as far south as Fort Pillow, between four hundred and five hundred miles above Vicksburg. Vicksburg itself was four hundred miles above New Orleans, so that the two fleets were over eight hundred miles apart. Nor was it known what obstacles the upper fleet would meet in descending the four hundred and fifty miles which separated it from Vicksburg. Nevertheless, the order of the department to Farragut, to which it is to be presumed he assented before starting on the New Orleans expedition, directed him to push up the river immediately if the expedition from Cairo "shall not have descended the river." The orders did not say "if it shall have descended," or "if it shall have descended to such and such a point," but they expressly said "if it shall not have descended." The condition, therefore, clearly arose for compliance with the order, and Farragut accordingly dropped the Mobile project and prepared to ascend the river. His object was, of course, to establish possession of the river, to effect a junction with the upper fleet when it should have come down to a point accessible to Farragut's squadron, and, most important of all, to interrupt the erection of bat-

teries by the Confederates which would render the river impassable to the National forces.

It has been pointed out by able critics that the department's plan of an expedition four hundred miles up the river from New Orleans to Vicksburg, which was about the limit of navigation for Farragut's larger ships, was an enterprise of extreme hazard owing to the uncertainty of communications in the enemy's country. There were also difficulties of navigation, especially at this season, when the river must soon fall, and there were dangers arising from the possible erection of batteries at points on the line of bluffs which extend along the river bank from Vicksburg two hundred and fifty miles to the south. This rendered the maintenance of communications, and especially of the coal supply, liable to interruption, and the vessels certainly incurred considerable risk in remaining at such an advanced position. Nevertheless, as it turned out, they were able to maintain their position in substantial control of the river as far as Vicksburg from the time they first ascended in May until their departure in the middle of July.

The real difficulty was that nearly three weeks were allowed to pass before the fleet got up to Vicksburg—a journey which it could readily have accomplished in three days. These three weeks were of momentous import. Farragut turned the city over to General Butler on the 1st of May. The Iroquois arrived at Baton Rouge on the 7th, and with the Oneida and the gunboats was at Natchez on the 12th. With them was a detachment of fifteen hundred troops under General Williams. These vessels, comprising the advance division, only arrived off Vicksburg on the 18th, where Farragut with the larger vessels caught up with them several days later. A council was then held at which Williams opposed an attack,

and a majority of the captains concurred with him in the opinion. Farragut says: "I was very sick at the time and yielded to their advice, which I think was good; but I doubt if I would have taken it had I been well." No attack was therefore made.

The position of Vicksburg, where the bluffs on the east bank of the Mississippi reach their highest point, close to a bend in the river, which they command for an unusual distance, was obviously such as to make that point the key to the defense of the river. Batteries were indeed erected at one or two other points, but none of them were comparable in natural advantages to Vicksburg. In the early part of May, however, the work of fortification, which was only begun on the 27th of April, had made little or no progress. According to General M. L. Smith, who took command of the Confederate defenses on the 12th of May, there were at that time only three batteries partly completed out of ten which he subsequently erected, and a fourth begun, and the armed troops consisted of what he describes as "a remnant of the Eighth Louisiana Battalion and the Twenty-seventh Louisiana Volunteers." From the 12th to the 18th the works were pushed forward night and day, with such effect that on the arrival of the National fleet with Williams and his men in the transports six batteries were complete, the gunners at their posts, and fairly drilled. The Union forces remained at Vicksburg until the 26th, during which time nothing was done. Farragut then returned to New Orleans. In the meantime the squadron of Foote, presently commanded by Davis, won the actions at Fort Pillow on the 10th of May, and at Memphis on the 5th of June, by which they were able to arrive above Vicksburg on the 1st of July. By this time, however, the position had been made impregnable to any

attack which did not include an overwhelming force of troops. Early in June, Farragut, under pressure of the urgent orders of the department, had made arrangements for an attack in force against Vicksburg, but he decided to wait for the arrival of the mortar-flotilla, which he ordered Porter to bring up for the purpose—a conclusive proof of Farragut's opinion of its value. Porter accordingly sailed from Pensacola on the 3d of June, and on the 9th all the mortar-vessels were in New Orleans. By the 13th sixteen vessels had started in tow of the steamers, and on the 20th they arrived before Vicksburg ready for service.

Considering the nature of the flotilla, the passage up was rapidly accomplished. Each gunboat had two mortar-schooners towing alongside. At two or three points in their progress the flotilla was attacked, once by field-pieces at Ellis's Bluffs, and on one or two other occasions, but the only losses were two men wounded. Porter's flag-ship was now the *Octorara*, a double-ender, which had been originally intended for this purpose, but which, not being completed when the expedition started, had been temporarily replaced by the *Harriet Lane*.

On the 21st of June, the day after his arrival at Vicksburg, Porter in the *Octorara*, with a mortar-schooner alongside, moved up toward the city to obtain ranges and draw the fire of the enemy's forts. All the neighboring batteries opened on the gunboat, which had the effect of giving Porter the range without doing him any injury. After firing a few shells from the mortar and the 100-pounder rifles, Porter determined on the proper stations for the flotilla, and returned to the anchorage.

On the night of the 26th Porter was occupied in getting the mortar-schooners into position, placing nine on the east side of the river at a distance of twenty-five

hundred yards, and eight on the west side seven hundred yards farther off. Later, all the schooners were moved up four hundred yards nearer the enemy's positions. All of them were dressed with bushes aloft and aloft in the same manner as at New Orleans. The next day the mortar-vessels opened at 5.45 in the morning and continued a steady fire until sunset, when Porter reported that he was ready to support the attack of the fleet.

The enemy's position at Vicksburg was exceptionally advantageous. The course of the river at the bend on which Vicksburg lay was first to the northeast, and then, after making a sharp turn, to the southwest. The bend of the river formed on its inner side a peninsula about four miles long, across which General Williams shortly after unsuccessfully attempted to dig a canal. On the opposite side, just below the bend, was the line of hills on the slope of which Vicksburg was built. The situation was such as to enable the batteries on the crest of the ridge to command the approaches of the river both above and below, and thus to enfilade attacking vessels as they approached on one side and they moved off on the other, and to deliver at all times a plunging fire upon their decks. The ships, on the other hand, could make but little impression on batteries situated at this great elevation. The fortifications were no longer in the unprepared condition in which, according to General Smith, they had been a month earlier, when the fleet first came up. The garrison had been largely reenforced and brought to a high state of efficiency. The batteries, although incomparably less powerful than they afterward became, mounted 25 heavy guns, of which one-half were rifles, and the place was completely prepared for attack.

It is not quite clear from Farragut's General Order



in reference to the attack what he intended to do. The ships were arranged in two columns, the three heavy sloops, the Richmond, Hartford, and Brooklyn, comprising the starboard column, while the six smaller vessels and gunboats formed the port column, two of them, the Iroquois and Oneida, on the port bow of the Richmond; two others, the Wissahickon and Sciota, opposite the interval between the Richmond and Hartford; the Winona and Pinola opposite the next interval, between the Hartford and Brooklyn; and the last two, the Kennebec and Katahdin, bringing up the rear of the port column, but astern of the Brooklyn. The General Order said: "When the vessels reach the bend in the river the Wissahickon, Sciota, Winona, and Pinola will continue on; but should the enemy continue the action, the ships and Iroquois and Oneida will stop their engines and drop down the river again, keeping up their fire until directed otherwise." This would seem to imply that unless the batteries were silenced only the four small gunboats named were to pass above the bend. As the bend was itself at the extreme northern end of the batteries, the plan involved, for the rest of the fleet, a double passage of the forts, both up and down. During the action the seven steamers of the mortar-flotilla, as at New Orleans, were to keep under way and cover by their fire, as far as possible, the passage of the fleet.

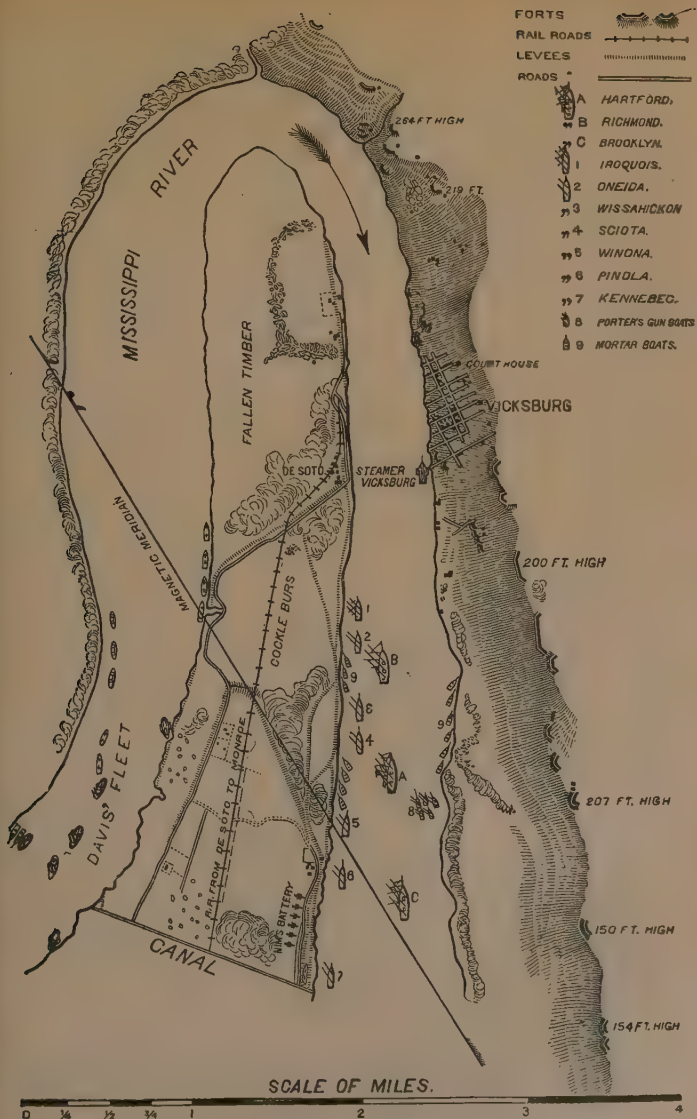
At eight o'clock on the night of the 27th the flotilla recommenced and poured in a heavy fire from all the mortars upon the town and batteries. At three o'clock the next morning the squadron started to make the passage. Again the mortars opened and their shells dropped with great rapidity and precision in the enemy's works. General Smith says of the bombardment that "a shower of bombshells was rained upon our batteries that se-



verely tried the nerve and courage of both officers and men." The maneuvering of the mortar-steamers, making, as it were, a third column, was no easy matter, but by the time the Hartford at the middle of the line began her passage up, they had got into position and were throwing in a quick fire upon the batteries.

The fleet steamed slowly against the current, and was a long time in reaching the bend of the river. It was impossible to preserve the order of sailing in two columns, and the ships were strung along at considerable intervals in a straggling formation in a single column, so that their fire lacked concentration and they were unable to give each other much support. Although the forts were not silenced, Farragut wisely decided that it was better to continue on than to return; but the Brooklyn, confused by the ambiguous terms of the General Order, and finding herself, with the battle still in progress, unable from the smoke to determine the movements of the Hartford, remained in position engaging the batteries. At length, seeing that the fleet had passed and that she remained alone with her two gunboats, she dropped with them down the river out of action. The casualties in the vessels that passed were few, and there were none in the others.

The mortar-steamers, however, did not get off so easily, and from their exposed position and continuance in the line of fire had several serious mishaps. The column was led by Porter in the Octorara. At the outset her wheel-ropes became jammed and she drifted by the vessel astern of her. Presently the ropes were cleared and she resumed her position. In the narrow river and strong current there was great difficulty in maneuvering and at the same time leaving room for the squadron to pass. To get out of the line of the Brooklyn's fire it was



Passage of Vicksburg batteries, June 28, 1862.

Order of attack.



necessary to slow the engines, and the vessels thereupon became stationary. At this juncture the Jackson was struck by a rifle-shell which exploded in her wheel-house, shattering the steering-gear, and rendering her unmanageable. Lieutenant Charles H. Baldwin of the Clifton was signaled to go to her assistance, but as Baldwin was preparing to tow her out his own vessel was struck by a 7-inch shot, which passed through her boiler. The escaping steam scalded half a dozen men to death, and others were badly injured, while the vessel herself was completely disabled. The third of the mortar-steamers, the Westfield, now going to the assistance of the others, was struck by a heavy shot on her engine-frame. While the ships were thus entangled Porter came to the rescue with the Octorara, towed the Clifton out of the line of fire, and cleared the way for the Jackson to drift into a position of safety. The effect of these three shots showed how vulnerable were the steamers of Porter's flotilla and how much risk was involved in subjecting them to such a fire as that at Vicksburg. Incidentally, it shows also how daring was Porter's attack on Fort Jackson on the night of the passage, and how wild was the gun practise of the Confederate artillerymen on that occasion. Temporary repairs were immediately put on the disabled vessels, and in a short time they were again ready for service.

Porter's comment on the battle is characteristic. He says: "It is to be regretted that a combined attack of the army and navy had not been made by which something more substantial might have been accomplished. Such an attack, I think, would have resulted in the capture of the city. Ships and mortar-vessels can keep full possession of the river and places near the water's edge, but they can not crawl up hills three hundred feet high, and it is that part of Vicksburg which must be taken by

the army. If it was intended merely to pass the batteries at Vicksburg and make a junction with the fleet of Flag-Officer Davis, the navy did it most gallantly and fearlessly. It was as handsome a thing as has been done during the war, for the batteries to be passed extended full three miles, with a three-knot current against ships that could not make eight knots under the most favorable circumstances."

Having passed the Vicksburg forts, Farragut presently was joined by the northern squadron, now under the command of Davis. He reported "that the forts can be passed, and we have done it, and can do it again as often as may be required of us. It will not, however, be an easy matter for us to do more than silence the batteries for a time, as long as the enemy has a large force behind the hills to prevent our landing and holding the place."

As before, the service in the mortar-flotilla, both in the steamers and schooners, was peculiarly severe upon everybody. Again we have to notice in Porter's report his strong commendation both of the divisional officers and of the acting masters commanding the mortar-vessels, nearly all of whom were volunteer officers who were gaining on this cruise their first naval experience. "Anchored at all times," he says, "in a position selected by myself more with regard to the object to be accomplished than to any one's comfort or safety, knowing that they will have to stay there without a chance of getting away till I think proper to remove them (no matter how thick the shot and shell may fly), there has always existed a rivalry as to who shall have the post of honor (the leading vessel), almost certain to be struck, if not destroyed. They know no weariness, and they really seem to take a delight in mortar-firing, which is painful even to those accustomed to it. It requires more than ordinary zeal to

stand the ordeal. Though I may have at times been exacting and fault-finding with them for not conforming to the rules of the service (which require the education of a lifetime to learn), yet I can not withhold my applause when I see these men working, with such earnest and untiring devotion to their duties while under fire." Farragut also refers to the same subject in his report, in which he says of Porter: "Nothing could exceed that officer's perseverance in getting to the scene of his labors, or the steadiness with which his officers and men have carried on his work of demolition and annoyance to the enemy, while I deeply regret the chance shots which caused the death of his brave men. But, as I stated in my last communication, Commander Porter's service has been hard upon his officers and crews, though they have performed it well, willingly, and unflinchingly."

On the 9th of July orders were received from the department detaching Porter from Farragut's squadron and ordering him to Hampton Roads with ten mortar-boats, the object being to form a flotilla in the James River to cooperate with the army in the reduction of the Confederate fortifications. On the following day Porter started down in the Octorara with the schooners in tow. His journey was without special incident, and he was glad enough to get away. There was clearly nothing more for the flotilla to do in the Mississippi, and his continuance on the station would have resulted in prolonged inactivity at Ship Island or Pensacola, or an assignment to one of the smaller vessels of the squadron, which was all that, as a junior commander, he could reasonably expect, and which would have given him no chance for important service.

It was upon his arrival at New Orleans in the Octorara on the 13th of July that he wrote to Farragut his

admirable discussion of the naval situation on the lower Mississippi, especially in connection with the occupation of the Red River. This "very interesting and suggestive letter," as Mr. Welles describes it, was sent by him to the Secretary of War, with the comment, "I place high value on Commander Porter's observations; and his urgent conviction that prompt action should be taken induces me to communicate his views to you." Mr. Stanton, in turn, immediately called the attention of Halleck, then general-in-chief, to the "valuable suggestions" of the letter. The document is remarkable, not only because of its masterly presentation of the subject and the side-lights which it throws on Porter's mind, but because of the important effect of its ideas upon the activities both of Farragut and of Porter, as well as of the two departments, during the next two years. The letter is too long to be quoted here, but it shows perhaps better than anything else Porter's extraordinary grasp of the bearings of a strategic question.

On his arrival at Washington and reporting to the Secretary, Porter found that no troops would be available to cooperate in the James River, and in fact that the department was in no hurry to proceed with the organization of the flotilla, and on the 1st of August he obtained a brief leave of absence to visit his family, then passing the summer at Newport.

While Porter was at Newport an incident occurred which illustrates the influence that the smallest trifles may sometimes have in working out the destinies not only of men but of nations. As Porter had shown again and again in the course of his career, he had an independent spirit which, while never approaching even remotely to insubordination, often carried him beyond the limits of criticism that a more prudent temper would have prescribed.



Coupled with this was a persistent and not always commendable habit of downright expression both in speech and in writing, especially on occasions when there was no serious business in hand, and sometimes even when there was. In a time of rebellion, above all others, when suspicions of disloyalty were rife and confidence was shaken even among those most intimately associated by ties of friendship or family, it behooved an officer to put a check upon his tongue; but Porter's tongue was not of the kind that is readily checked, and upon one occasion at the club in Newport he allowed himself to be drawn into a quasi-political discussion over the merits and demerits of various generals, Union and Confederate, in which he expressed himself with his usual terseness and freedom.

It might be supposed that by this time Porter's loyalty had been sufficiently tested. Coming from a Massachusetts family and a Pennsylvanian by birth, there could be no suggestion that he was tainted by sectional prejudices. During the year and more of the war that had passed he had been engaged in the most active service under the Government. In the preparation of the New Orleans expedition he had been closely associated with the President, the Secretary of the Navy, and Fox, the last of whom had been his intimate friend for years. Yet it would appear that through some agent of the Secret Service, either amateur or professional, or through some mere busybody, Porter's words or some words resembling them were repeated to the authorities, and made such an impression that an order was issued summoning him to Washington without delay. This was on August 7th. Upon his arrival he was unable to see the Secretary, but was informed by Fox that the Octorara had been given to another officer and despatched to Charleston, and that the mortar-vessels were to be

turned over to Commodore Wilkes, who was placed in command of the James River flotilla; while Porter himself was presently to be sent to St. Louis as a subordinate to Commodore Hull, a superannuated officer then engaged in inspecting the construction of gunboats at that city. No more ingeniously cruel punishment could well be conceived, nor did it lessen the force of the blow that it was delivered by a lifelong friend; yet Porter in view of his subordinate rank could not take exception to the assignment as unsuitable to his position in the service.

Porter concluded to return to Newport, but before leaving Washington he took occasion to call on the President, to whom he was now well known, both from the Fort Pickens episode and from the part which he had taken in the conception and execution of the plan for the capture of New Orleans. In fact, the two men had conceived for each other a strong regard, the result of a mutual attraction. There was much in Porter that appealed directly to Mr. Lincoln's temperament. His never-failing resource, his evident knowledge of his business, his readiness with a plan whenever a plan was required, his directness of speech, his independence of routine and contempt for red tape, and last, but perhaps not least, his strong vein of boyish humor, which he never took pains to repress—a characteristic in which he somewhat resembled his commander-in-chief—all attracted the President and led him, when they were afterward thrown together on the James River, to find in Porter's breezy companionship a relief from the perplexities, the worries, the deceptions and the scheming, by which the Administration during the Civil War was surrounded.

At the interview the President made Porter go over all the events of the New Orleans campaign and describe

to him the situation in the Mississippi, where the reduction of Vicksburg had now become imperative, if the National occupation of the river was to be maintained. Porter's ideas on the subject were clear and well defined, and he could present them with a lucidity and directness that carried conviction, as was shown by his letter to Farragut written on the way home. The President was deeply impressed by his recital, and assured him that he should be present at the capture of Vicksburg. He wanted to send for Fox at once, but Porter, pleading the necessity of catching his train, excused himself and went back to Newport.

Not long afterward Porter, while still on leave at Newport, got a second despatch ordering him to report at Washington. Upon his arrival there he was received by the Secretary, who handed him an order. At his last visit he had left the department in disfavor, if not in disgrace, with an impending assignment to duty that would have virtually ended his career. So far as he knew, this assignment was about to be carried out. But the order that was now handed him appointed him to a position which in his wildest dreams he could never have looked for, and which, in his existing rank, seemed wholly beyond his reach. It was not difficult to see the hand of the President in the appointment. This was the order:

"Under the authority of an 'Act to promote the efficiency of the navy,' you are selected to command the Mississippi squadron. You will therefore proceed to Cairo, Ill., by the 12th instant and report to Acting Rear-Admiral Charles H. Davis, who will transfer the command of that squadron to yourself, when you will immediately hoist your flag as acting rear-admiral."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MISSISSIPPI SQUADRON—CHICKASAW BLUFFS AND ARKANSAS POST

THE turning-point had now been reached in Porter's life. At the outbreak of the war he was still a lieutenant, under orders to command a small Coast Survey party in the Pacific. Shortly after came his promotion in regular course to commander, and while still near the foot of his grade he received the unusual assignment of a divisional command in Farragut's fleet, although the junior of most of his fellow captains. His work had been successful, but it had come to an end without resulting in any advancement. In the meantime the navy had been reorganized, and for the first time in its history the grades of rear-admiral and of commodore had been established. Four rear-admirals had been appointed—Farragut, Goldsborough, Du Pont, and Foote. Of these, Farragut was easily first, both in seniority and in distinction, his victory at New Orleans having made him the foremost man in the navy. Goldsborough was at the time in command of the North Atlantic blockading squadron. His advancement was due partly to his high place on the navy list, and partly to the command to which he was assigned. Du Pont and Foote were also high in rank, and both had won important victories, the first at Port Royal, the second at Fort Henry and Island No. 10. Both were men of high qualities, though neither was in the same class with Porter as a leader of naval operations.

After the four rear-admirals were eighteen new commodores. Three of these had been captains in Farragut's fleet at New Orleans—Bailey, Morris, and Bell. Next came forty captains, and then the commanders, of whom Porter was twenty-sixth. For him the war had done nothing in the way of promotion. In fact, the creation of the new grades had really put him back, as he was now in the fourth grade instead of the second; nor had he yet been entrusted with the duty for which he ardently longed and for which, as the result showed, he was peculiarly fitted, that of an independent command.

By one of those sudden turns of fortune which can only happen in war this ambition was gratified. Commodore Davis, who had succeeded Foote, was shortly to give up the Mississippi squadron, after a brief but brilliant record, and the Government was looking for a man to fill his place. For this purpose it passed over the heads of eighty officers of more suitable rank, some of them serving in this very squadron, and selected Porter, giving him the local and temporary rank of acting rear-admiral. It was a selection made personally by the President, who recognized far better than any one else the qualities of the officer whom he had thus singled out for the most important naval post in the gift of the Government.

The Mississippi squadron at this time was a command of singular difficulty, but for that reason Porter was all the better fitted to fill it. It called forth all his peculiar powers as no other naval command in the war would have done. It lasted for two years of incessant activity. Its operations extended over more than three thousand miles of navigable rivers, spreading out in all directions through the interior of the enemy's country. It included more than a hundred and fifty vessels of the most miscellaneous description. The necessities of the situation, and

in particular the demands of the army, with which the fleet was always cooperating, made the service especially arduous and imposed constantly recurring and unexpected burdens and responsibilities upon the commander-in-chief. The difficulties and uncertainties of navigation in a river system so liable to sudden rise and fall as that of the Mississippi and its branches, upon which the admiral was always bound to keep a watchful eye, added in no slight degree to the hazard of the service; and there were few officers who would not gladly have exchanged for the dangers of the open sea, with which they were familiar, the possibility of being left high and dry on one of the tributaries of the Mississippi without water enough to float their craft out of the enemy's reach. Farragut had written, when his ship was aground in the Mississippi, "It is a sad thing to think of having your ship on a mud bank, five hundred miles from the natural element of a sailor." Porter would hardly have expressed himself in this way, for to him the natural element of a sailor in the navy was wherever he could get at the enemy, on a flatboat in six inches of water if need be, or in the last extremity, on dry land. Yet the dangers and difficulties of such navigation were sufficiently apparent, as Porter had good reason to discover more than once. The vessels were exposed to constant peril from sudden attack, nor could the most vigilant commander foresee or inform himself about the rapid concentration of the enemy at any point on the river-banks. There was little or nothing in the way of reserve forces to draw upon. The manufacturing resources of the loyal cities in the river-valleys had been taxed to their utmost, and the loss of a vessel meant a loss that could not be repaired, or one that could be repaired only after great delay; while a serious blow, such as the disabling of an important part of



the squadron, might lead to the recovery of the Mississippi, in part at least, by the Confederates, and the loss of all that the country had gained in the succession of victories at Island No. 10, Memphis, and New Orleans. The climate, especially during the hot months, was one of the most unhealthy in the United States; and the demon of malarial fever, with the mental and physical weakness, apathy, and languor that always accompany it, sapped the energies of all who were not thoroughly acclimated. The arduous duties of the command had used up two flag-officers, Foote and Davis, and yet their work had been as child's play compared with that which was to follow. The mere physical wear and tear of the position was enormous, while the moral strain sustained during two years was such as few men could survive.

The Mississippi squadron at this date was composed of vessels of the utmost variety of type, most of them types which no naval officer had ever seen, much less considered as a factor in belligerent operations, until a few months before. Its nucleus had consisted of three wooden river steamboats with side-wheels, the *Conestoga*, *Lexington*, and *Tyler*. These had been altered by lowering their boilers and protecting them by an oak breast-work. Next came the seven iron-clad "gunboats"—the rather misleading term applied to all vessels of the squadron—which were built by Eads, and named after the river cities, *Cairo*, *Carondelet*, *Cincinnati*, *Louisville*, *Mound City*, *Pittsburg*, and *St. Louis*. When the squadron was taken into the navy, which already had a *St. Louis*, the name of this last vessel was changed to the *De Kalb*. These seven ships were propelled by a paddle-wheel placed in an opening in the after-part of the vessel midway between the sides. Covering nearly the whole of the vessel was a square house or casemate protected



at the forward end and abreast of the machinery by a light iron plating. Surmounting the casemate was an armored pilot-house of conical shape. Each vessel carried thirteen guns of various descriptions, and to the naval, and indeed to the unprofessional eye, presented a most singular appearance. In the army they were commonly spoken of as "the turtles." To these must be added one other vessel with a similar armored casemate, but carrying a more powerful battery, the Benton, which had been altered from a snag-boat. She was twice as large as the Eads gunboats, but one of the slowest ships in the squadron. Of a similar type was the Essex, named after the ship in which Commodore Porter had made his Pacific cruise in 1813. She was commanded by William D. Porter, also a son of the commodore, but considerably the senior of his more famous brother both in age and rank. In dash and gallantry the two brothers were much alike. William Porter had nearly lost his life at the attack on Fort Henry, where the boiler of the Essex was burst by a shell from the fort. In the previous summer he had run the batteries at Vicksburg, and captured the ironclad Arkansas, the Essex being then transferred to Farragut's fleet. In this way it happened that though the Essex really belonged to the upper squadron, William Porter did not come under his brother's command. The seven Eads gunboats, with the Benton and the Essex, constituted the main element of offensive strength in the original squadron. None of them had any great speed, and they could barely stem the current of the river; while their shape and the position of their wheel made them awkward vessels to maneuver, and in spite of Porter's improvements in their armor they were still vulnerable.

Another distinctive feature of the squadron was the so-called ram fleet, composed of nine river boats, some

of them side-wheelers, others stern-wheel tugs, which had been strengthened by heavy timbers and bulkheads for use as rams. They were entirely exposed to shot, and in the beginning carried no guns, but they had high speed, and produced from time to time important results within their limited sphere of action. The best of these were the *Queen of the West*, *Monarch*, *Lancaster*, and *Switzerland*.

There were also in the squadron a number of serviceable vessels which had been captured from the enemy, of which the *Eastport*, seized by Phelps in his raid up the Tennessee River in 1862, was by far the most efficient. The *General Price*, the *General Bragg*, and the *Little Rebel* were among the captured gunboats, and were excellent vessels of their class. There were also forty mortar-boats, only useful for special purposes.

Such was the composition of the squadron which Porter found on his arrival. Shortly after important additions were made to it. First came the so-called light-drafts. These were small stern-wheel boats, armed with howitzers, and well adapted for scouting service. They drew so little water that it was commonly said of them that they "would float in a heavy dew." From their light armor protection they were familiarly known as "tinclads." They took their full share of the fighting in the shoal and narrow streams and bayous that abound in the Mississippi Valley. Drawing less than two feet, they could go almost anywhere, and with their howitzers and light bullet-proof armor they were extremely serviceable against the attacks of sharpshooters on the banks. Many of them, such as the *Rattler*, *Romeo*, *Juliet*, *Linden*, *Forest Rose*, and *Signal*, became famous in the annals of the squadron, and the tiny *Cricket*, for the moment used by the admiral as his flag-ship, fought in the Red

River one of the hottest and most gallant actions of the Western campaign.

Another and more formidable group of vessels was completed soon after Porter took command. The Lafayette and Choctaw were large, well-built, side-wheel river steamers, which had been altered into iron-clad gunboats. Their casemates were more heavily armored than those of the earlier boats, and in addition they were fitted with rams. They were among the best vessels in the squadron. Several new ironclads were also built especially for the service. They were the vessels whose construction Porter was to assist in superintending when the department, as a disciplinary measure, proposed sending him to inspection duty. Three of these, the Tuscumbia, Indianola, and Chillicothe, all fitted with armored casemates, were completed and joined the squadron in the early months of 1863. Owing to bad work in their construction they were far less efficient than the Lafayette and Choctaw, but took a place, which they did not deserve, in the class of heavy fighting ships. Toward the end of the Vicksburg campaign three excellent river monitors, the Ozark, Osage, and Neosho, were also completed. These again were of a totally different design from the other ships. They had single revolving turrets like Ericsson's Monitor, and were of very light draft.

The Government also purchased an immense number of river steamers, upon which more or less alteration was made to fit them for gunboats. They were of all sizes and descriptions, of every mode of propulsion in use upon the river, and they carried armaments which included pretty nearly every variety of gun then known either in the military or naval service, except those of the heaviest caliber. Some of them were used for special purposes, such as hospital ships, machine shops, storeships, powder-

vessels, despatch-boats, and so on, but most of them were gunboats more or less adapted to fighting. As a whole, they were as different from the prevailing type of naval vessel as could well be imagined. Never was there a more heterogeneous collection of nondescripts assembled under an admiral's flag than the one hundred and fifty craft which Porter commanded. It required no inconsiderable effort merely to keep in mind their various fighting and navigating qualities. One of Porter's first cares was to bring their armaments to some sort of uniformity by the substitution of the regular types of naval guns. But a greater difficulty was found in the personnel. It was impossible to obtain officers and men from the regular navy for such an extensive squadron, and great numbers of river-men and pilots were commissioned or enlisted for the service. Even so, they were always short-handed. Under Porter's direction the force was worked into a complete unity and cohesion and brought to a high state of military efficiency. Nothing is more remarkable in the history of this remarkable Mississippi campaign than the way in which Porter, by his extraordinary personal influence, created a naval corps of officers and men for service on the Mississippi out of the miscellaneous materials that he found at hand.

Of course, to these men a vessel of the regular navy was an object as strange as their own mongrel ships were to the trained men-of-war's men. Davis, in his journal, describing the meeting of the fleets above Vicksburg at the end of June, 1862, refers to this mutual feeling of astonishment. He says: "To the navy officers, especially the old ones, there were wanting many sources of excitement shared by others: to the majority of the men and volunteer officers everything was strange and wonderful. My own people almost lost their senses. Cap-

tain Phelps and myself were very much amused at their bewilderment at the first sight of a fleet of regular men-of-war. Our own gunboats were objects of great curiosity also to the men-of-war's men; so were the little tugs. When I passed through the fleets in the Jessie Benton to Flag-Officer Farragut's ship to make the first call, with the red flag indicating my rank and presence, the higher decks and ports of every vessel were crowded. I should not have thought beforehand that so striking and exciting a scene could have been created by the meeting of two squadrons."

Porter's command at the beginning included the Mississippi River, from St. Louis to Vicksburg, with all its tributaries. The river below Vicksburg was assigned to the West Gulf Blockading squadron under Farragut. This dividing line was made both by the official limits of the two commands and by the batteries at Vicksburg, which separated the forces above and below. A fleet might pass them once, but could not pass and repass. The dependence of the army upon the squadron restricted the gunboats to points above Vicksburg, as long as the army was operating against Vicksburg from the north. When Grant determined to attack from the south, part of the squadron passed below Vicksburg, and Porter's command was extended to New Orleans, including the vast system of the Red River. But so great an importance did Porter attach to the Red River that he was operating in that quarter long before it was assigned to him.

The main field of Porter's operations in the early months was on the Mississippi itself, from St. Louis to Vicksburg, a distance by the river of over eight hundred miles. At the St. Louis shipyards were carried on the works of new construction. The principal station of

the squadron was at Cairo, at the mouth of the Ohio. Cairo was Porter's depot, his navy-yard, and his headquarters—though he was hardly there at all during the Vicksburg campaign. In its immediate vicinity were the shipyards of Mound City, used for pressing repairs. While Porter was away directing active operations, as was the case most of the time, his instructions were faithfully and intelligently carried out by his chief of staff, Fleet-Captain Alexander M. Pennock, an officer well fitted for the administrative duties required of him. Above Cairo, the Ohio River, with its two great branches, the Cumberland and the Tennessee, contributed an important part of the burdens of the admiral's command, covering as they did fifteen hundred miles of inland navigation. The two latter traverse portions of Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky, which through the whole two years of Porter's service were the scene of active operations on both sides, some of them of the utmost importance in the complicated strategy of the campaigns of the interior. Even the Ohio did not escape, and the daring raid of Morgan into Indiana in 1863 was, in fact, brought to an end by the gunboats of the Mississippi squadron. During the entire period it was a part of Porter's duty to maintain efficient naval control of all these rivers. Kentucky and Tennessee were debatable ground, in which the rivers formed great natural highways. The demands upon the gunboats were incessant. It was necessary to keep the rivers open as lines of communication for the armies, to patrol them to prevent the passage of the enemy, to be ever on the watch against the sudden occupation of important points by flying columns, to be always ready to assist the movements of the National troops, and to check the movements of the enemy. Again and again it happened that the largest



operations were dependent for their success upon the readiness and efficiency of the gunboats at isolated points, and the nature of the service was such that the exigency could not be foreseen long in advance, and efficiency of action could only be maintained by constant watchfulness and alertness on the part of the commander-in-chief and all his subordinates.

The Mississippi itself, from Cairo down, imposed the most pressing responsibilities. Midway between Cairo and Vicksburg was the town of Helena in Arkansas, which was always occupied by a garrison of National troops, and became a sort of half-way house and a post of great importance both to the army and the fleet. It was the only prominent point on the west bank. The land on this bank lay so low that it was often overflowed, and it was filled with swamps, streams, bayous, and lakes. In this stretch of the river there were two great tributaries, the Arkansas and White Rivers, in the State of Arkansas, uniting with the Mississippi one hundred miles below Helena. Below Vicksburg was a still more important tributary, the Red River, crossing the State of Louisiana, with its great branches, the Black, the Tensas, and the Ouachita. These two river systems, belonging respectively to Arkansas and to Louisiana, and comprising between them two thousand additional miles of more or less navigable water, were the main arteries of transportation between the trans-Mississippi country and the rest of the Confederacy. The importance of occupying these western tributaries had been strongly urged in Porter's letter to Farragut in the previous June. In his view the cutting off of the supplies in their transit across the Mississippi and the breaking up of the system was one of the primary objects of the expedition to New Orleans. The object might have been accomplished had the army



and the fleet captured Vicksburg in May, 1862, and thus opened the river; but this great opportunity was lost. Vicksburg had not been attacked, but had been suffered to complete its fortifications, until now it was almost impregnable and really deserved its title of the "Gibraltar of the West"; and in consequence, the transportation of the supplies and munitions of war, so essential to the maintenance of the Confederate armies in the Eastern States, was continued from the time of Farragut's departure, in July, 1862, for six months, almost without interruption.

Porter arrived at Cairo and assumed command of the squadron on the 15th of October, 1862. At this time operations were at a standstill, as they had been for several months. The advance post of the squadron toward the south was at Helena, where Commander Henry Walke, a brave and capable officer, was in command of a detached force of gunboats. Nearly opposite Helena was Yazoo Pass, at the head of the impenetrable Yazoo Delta, which extended for two hundred miles from that point to Vicksburg. From Helena to Baton Rouge the river had been abandoned to the enemy. The Army of the Tennessee under Grant, having Vicksburg for its main objective, was eastward of Memphis, and holding the line of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, where it had been since the 1st of June. It had just repulsed the attack of Van Dorn in the battles of Iuka and Corinth, and had again reduced the enemy to taking the defensive. Sherman's division of Grant's army was at Memphis ready to move south either by the river or by land, via Corinth, as might be required.

Upon assuming the command in October Porter found much to be done to bring the squadron to the required efficiency for active operations. His predeces-

sor, Davis, one of the most accomplished officers of the service, had been saddled with the anomalous organization of a naval fleet under the orders of the army and under the administrative charge of the War Department; a stupid and bungling arrangement, which had lasted for more than a year, and had only come to an end just before Porter's arrival. The summer climate of the river, with its prostrating fevers, had told severely upon the crews; and the prolonged inaction, lasting from the withdrawal of the vessels from before Vicksburg in July, had contributed its pervasive elements, as insidious as malaria itself, of apathy and demoralization.

Porter's first duty was to bring his heterogeneous squadron into shape, to infuse into it some of his own energy and vigor, to impose upon it the tradition and spirit of the service, to make it in fact, as it had just been made for the first time in name, an integral and efficient part of the navy. He was to weld it by the magic of his personal character and influence into a single homogeneous force. This could not be done in a day or a week. In the meantime he was getting his vessels as quickly as possible into a state of readiness to cooperate with the army as soon as it decided on a plan of campaign. He was occupied in this way for a busy fortnight, working day and night. He opened communication with General Grant, and kept him informed of the situation of the fleet, and on the 29th of October he was able to report to the Navy Department that he was "ready to move at any moment."

The admiral selected for his flag-ship the *Black Hawk*, and put Lieutenant-Commander Randolph Breese in command of her. The *Black Hawk* was not armored, but she was a large and fast river boat, with a mixed battery, and was admirably adapted for the use to which

she was to be put, that of a headquarters boat at the scene of active operations, ready to take part in fighting or in any other service as occasion required. Her captain, Breese, had been one of the three commanders of divisions in the mortar-flotilla at New Orleans. He was a chivalrous and knightly fellow, of great gallantry, the soul of honor, and with a winning manner that endeared him to all those who had the good fortune to know him well. It was in the mortar-flotilla that the strong mutual attachment had sprung up between Breese and his commanding officer which led the admiral to apply for his assignment to the Mississippi squadron. While Pen-nock was actually the fleet captain, and represented the admiral at the depot at Cairo, Breese was his chief of staff at the front, the officer who in all things was closest to him, and in whom he placed the fullest confidence. It was much more than a mere official relation, for Porter regarded Breese with a feeling of strong affection—a feeling which Breese's loyal and gallant spirit returned in kind. The relation continued unbroken throughout the war—through the long and harassing campaign against Vicksburg, the perilous expedition in the next year in the Red River, and the operations of the great North Atlantic fleet resulting in the victory of Fort Fisher—the crowning achievement of the admiral's career.

Apart from the demands of the principal campaign then in preparation against Vicksburg, Porter gave much attention to the general requirements of the situation as he found it on the Western rivers, and the disposition of the gunboats for the maintenance of the river patrol. At this time all vessels on the rivers were suffering from the guerrilla warfare that was persistently carried on by detached parties of the enemy along the banks. Many of

these guerrillas were mere marauders unattached to any military organization. While the gunboats made an extremely mobile force that could operate with great rapidity at remote points, serving almost the purpose of floating fortresses, they were limited to their own element, here a mere ribbon of water; and the intimate knowledge of the country possessed by their assailants, their skilful use of shelters along the banks, and the facility with which they could move from point to point made it difficult even for the gunboats to cope with them, while unarmed ships, whether mail-steamers, transports, or supply steamers, were almost at their mercy. It often happened that a vessel would be attacked at one point, and after passing through a circular bend in the river, would find itself again attacked by the same gang, which had merely crossed a narrow neck of land for the purpose. Even the Ohio was not free from these marauders, and a short time before Porter's arrival the steamer Hazel Dell had been plundered by guerrillas attacking her from the Kentucky shore. Soon after, the mail-steamer Blue Wing on her way down the river from Cairo with coal-barges in tow was captured by guerrillas at the mouth of the White River in Arkansas, up which she was carried by her captors and found a refuge at Arkansas Post, under the guns of the Confederate Fort Hindman.

To check these enterprises Porter adopted measures of the utmost rigor. A landing force was put ashore wherever it was reported that vessels had been attacked, and several captures were made of guerrillas, who were immediately placed in close confinement. A notice was issued on the subject of marauding which was couched in the plain and forcible language so characteristic of the admiral. It was as follows:

"Persons taken in the act of firing on unarmed ves-

sels from the banks will be treated as highwaymen and assassins, and no quarter will be shown them. Persons strongly suspected of firing on unarmed vessels will not receive the usual treatment of prisoners of war, but will be kept in close confinement.

“If this savage and barbarous Confederate practise can not be put a stop to, we will try what virtue there is in hanging. All persons, no matter who they are, who are caught in the act of pillaging the houses of the inhabitants along the river, levying contributions, or burning cotton will receive no quarter if caught in the act, or if it is proved upon them.”

Porter was not long in discovering that it was physically impossible to satisfy the demands for naval cooperation made by army officers commanding posts along the rivers. Everybody wanted a gunboat. Many of these demands were unreasonable, and they were usually based upon startling rumors of a projected attack upon the post. Porter says in one of his reports: “At Island No. 10 I have been notified that the commander had been ordered to abandon that post and spike his guns. I have ordered the Pittsburg up there to hold it. . . . The commanding officer at Columbus hears that forty thousand men are advancing on him and wants a gunboat. I sent him the New Era, and ordered Commander Pennock to fit 32-pounders on the old mortar-rafts and plant them in front of Columbus. General Curtis calls for a large force of gunboats. . . . General Gorman wants two gunboats at Helena. He says he is utterly powerless with five thousand infantry and two thousand cavalry. I suppose I must raise them. The General Bragg is stationed at Memphis to protect that place and repair her machinery. I have sent the Conestoga to the mouth of the Arkansas River to protect the troops about to be sta-

tioned there and to prevent any intercourse up or down the Arkansas." The difficulty was that every now and then the rumor of attack turned out to be true. Some of the applications came from the War Department. Thus General Halleck writes to Fox: "It is reported that Bragg's army is moving down the Tennessee River with the probable intention of occupying some point or points on the east bank in order to interrupt navigation. Generals Grant and Rosecrans urge the importance of sending some gunboats up that river as early as possible." At this time Porter had five gunboats on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, but the Navy Department directed him to send up more. Porter cut the knot of all these complications by telegraphing Grant in his direct way while still at Cairo: "I have a few vessels here. Where will you have them?"

Shortly before this Grant had made a hurried visit to Cairo to confer with Porter, explain in detail his plans, and secure the cooperation of the squadron. It was the first meeting of these two officers, each of whom was afterward to reach the head of his branch of the service, and it was the beginning of their close association during the Vicksburg campaign, where perfect harmony of action was indispensable to success. The secret of this harmony lay partly in the natural attraction between the two men as men, which began at their first meeting. In some qualities they were much alike. Both were distinguished by great simplicity and directness of character, and equally great simplicity and directness of expression. There was nothing artificial about their point of view, their minds, their speech, or their manners. They had the same habit of looking facts straight in the face, of going directly to the heart of things, the same contempt for sham and pretense. Each of them was a master of his



craft, uniting a comprehensive grasp of great matters with a minute faculty for detail. In merely social qualities, the traits that make for companionship, no two men could have been more unlike. Grant was essentially reserved, Porter essentially expansive. Grant's manner was generally serious, almost grave; Porter, although of an iron sternness in matters of discipline and in the business of war, had a natural buoyancy of temper and an overflow of animal spirits that sometimes took the form of pleasantry, and pleasantry of a rather boyish kind. In this latter quality he more resembled Sherman, for whom he had a strong personal sympathy. With Grant this personal intimacy did not exist; the two officers were loyal colleagues in an arduous undertaking, and their relation was one of mutual reliance and respect. Under their direction the two services worked together in perfect accord. They made a marvelously efficient combination, and it is but justice to say that, so far as the efficiency of naval cooperation depended upon their harmonious relations, Grant contributed his full share to the result. His extraordinary self-restraint, his freedom from all vanity or spirit of encroachment, and his distinct perception of official relations, preserved him from attempting to exercise an authority which he did not possess; and his correspondence with Porter is uniformly marked by a recognition of the latter's equality and independence of command. Porter, on the other hand, who was not a pushing person, never sought to assert or emphasize his independence of the other's authority; and he gave his support to the army, whether asked or unasked, with a fidelity, zeal, and energy that could not have been surpassed had he been acting under the most peremptory orders.

The enemy's position at Vicksburg was one of great



natural strength. The city, which formed the center of the position, was at the point where the line of bluffs, sweeping round from the northeast on the southern side of the Yazoo Valley, abuts on the Mississippi and is continued southward along its left bank, forming the western edge of the interior plateau. At the foot of the bluffs above Vicksburg, called the Chickasaw Bluffs, lies the Yazoo River; at the foot of the bluffs stretching southward from Vicksburg is the Mississippi itself. The fortifications crowned the ridge almost continuously from Haynes's Bluff on the Yazoo, thirteen miles northeast of Vicksburg, which thus formed the right flank of the enemy, to the left flank at Warrenton, six miles below Vicksburg on the Mississippi. Thirty miles below Warrenton was Grand Gulf, a strong but isolated work. This was the last fortification of the Confederates on that portion of the river. To turn the enemy's right from the river, it was necessary to get around Haynes's Bluff; to turn his left, the fleet must go below Warrenton, possibly below Grand Gulf, which meant the passage of the Vicksburg batteries.

The early campaign of 1862, from Cairo down to Memphis, had been successfully accomplished by an army moving on solid ground parallel with the river, and at no great distance from it, in conjunction with gunboats on the river itself, with which the army remained in touch. But in the stretch of two hundred miles from Yazoo Pass to Vicksburg, comprising the so-called Yazoo Delta, no such joint operation was practicable. There was no point in this territory where troops could operate, and east of the Delta in central Mississippi an army advancing southward would be sixty miles away from the river, and must depend upon itself for protecting its communications. If the right flank was to be turned by

the army, it must be done from the interior, and done by the army alone.

Nor was there any way in which the fleet could operate alone on the right flank. Haynes's Bluff, directly overhanging the Yazoo, or Snyder's Mill, as the post was called, with the subsidiary line of works running to Drumgould's Bluff, could not be reduced by a naval attack in front; nor could they be passed, as the river, here only one hundred and fifty yards wide, was closed hermetically by obstructions. Between this point and the Yazoo mouth, however, at the foot of the Chickasaw Bluffs,<sup>1</sup> lay a tract of low, swampy ground, triangular in shape, and bounded on its three sides by the bluffs, the Yazoo, and the Mississippi. Here it seemed possible that a landing might be made, not for flanking purposes, but to assault the Chickasaw Bluffs directly in front; and here the landing could be covered by gunboats stationed in the Yazoo.

Shortly after the victory of Corinth Grant had prepared a well-defined plan of action, which was to concentrate his forces and move down through Holly Springs and Grenada, by the line of the Mississippi Central Railroad on the high ground east of the Yazoo Delta, and attack Vicksburg in the rear, for which he would require his whole army. Unfortunately, General McClernand, who had been on a visit to Washington, had persuaded the Government to sanction a quasi-independent expedition under his command down the Mississippi, an enterprise for which McClernand was entirely unfitted. He was to use Sherman's division of Grant's army and some new levies that he was personally to raise in Illinois, and was to attack Vicksburg in front simultaneously with

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<sup>1</sup> Marked on the map "Walnut Hills," by which name they were also known.

Grant's attack on the rear. The project was kept a secret and was opposed by Halleck, the general in chief, and the result was that for six weeks during November and December Grant was so hampered by contradictory orders, and so in doubt as to what troops he controlled, that his movements were hesitating and uncertain, and his forces were delayed some distance to the north of Grenada, when they should have been in the neighborhood of Vicksburg—and would have been if the general could have had his own way. He began his advance southward in the second week of November on the line of the Mississippi Central Railroad. It is no part of our story to describe the mismanagement and vacillation in Washington which made his campaign a failure. It is enough to say here that Sherman's division was finally withdrawn for the river expedition, which actually took place the next month; but that owing to McClelland's failure to arrive in time, it was commanded by Sherman himself.

As soon as Porter was apprised of the general plan of advance, comprising Grant's movement to Grenada and Jackson by the Mississippi Central Railroad, and the simultaneous descent of the river by the army at Memphis, to assault Vicksburg in front, he made his preparations accordingly. The point that engaged his attention was the bottom-land at the mouth of the Yazoo. This lowland was five miles in width at its lower end, narrowing to a point at Haynes's Bluff, and skirted the Yazoo River for a distance of ten or fifteen miles. Directly above and in front rose the Chickasaw Bluffs, or Walnut Hills, a steep ascent crowned by the enemy's works. It was not a good place to land, for it was obstructed by an almost continuous line of lakes and morasses, which lay directly under the enemy's guns,

but it was the only place, for elsewhere the Vicksburg bluffs came to the water's edge; and to secure control of it and of that portion of the Yazoo River adjoining it was the object of Porter's first movement.

For this purpose orders were issued to assemble the available ironclads at Helena. On the 21st of November Porter directed Captain Walke in the Carondelet, then in command at Helena, to proceed with the gunboats to the mouth of the Yazoo, secure the control of the river, and prevent the erection of batteries on the land at the foot of the Chickasaw Bluffs. Besides the five ironclads—Cairo, Carondelet, Cincinnati, Pittsburg, and De Kalb—Walke was to take the Lexington and Tyler, and two of the new light-drafts or tinclads, the Signal and Marmora. "In case," wrote the admiral, "you can not get into the Yazoo with the large vessels you will send in the Signal and Marmora, with some good marksmen on board besides their crews. Let them hold on to all they can until you are enabled to get large vessels up. We must make a landing for the army; at all events, we must prevent the rebels from raising forts right under our noses. . . . The object is to prevent the enemy from blocking up the approach to the river with batteries. General McClelland will move now in about two weeks, and we must have the place clear for him to land his troops; the object is to get possession of as much of the Yazoo as we can, and hold it until he comes."

In pursuance of these instructions Walke, on his arrival at the mouth of the Yazoo, sent up the Marmora and Signal, "with some good marksmen on board to hold all they could until he could get the large vessels up." On the 11th of December the two gunboats entered the river, and, after steaming up for several miles, discovered the presence of torpedoes. One of these

exploded near the Signal; another was ignited by firing a musket at its head. The vessels thereupon returned and reported that they could destroy the torpedoes if some of the heavier vessels would come up and protect them. On the following day the Cairo and Pittsburg were accordingly sent up with the Queen of the West, preceded by the two tinclads. The ascent of the river was uneventful until a point was reached three miles below Snyder's, when a sudden explosion took place under the bow of the Cairo, and, though she was pushed into the bank, she sank almost immediately, the victim of a torpedo over which her lighter consort had passed in safety. The crew were saved and were immediately sent up in the Marmora to the depot at Cairo in charge of Lieutenant Selfridge, their late commander.

Selfridge was at this time twenty-six years old and had recently joined the squadron. As the first graduate of the reorganized Naval Academy—an institution not looked upon altogether with favor by the older officers—he carried a certain burden of responsibility for the junior branch of the service. He had already been unlucky in serving on a ship that was lost—the ill-fated Cumberland, which the Merrimac had sunk in Hampton Roads. Brave, impulsive, and conscientious, he was now to report to the admiral the loss of the Cairo, one of the best vessels of the squadron, within a few days after he had been selected for the command—a command the like of which Porter himself had not been able to secure during thirty years of service.

At the time of the catastrophe Porter was still at Cairo, pushing the work of completing and fitting out the new gunboats, General Grant being now engaged in his advance on Grenada. On the 12th of December, the same day that the Cairo was sunk, Sherman wrote

to Porter from Memphis that the river expedition was about to start; and the admiral immediately set out in his flag-ship, the Black Hawk, with such of the fleet as were not already below. At Memphis he met Sherman for the first time, and cordially returned the expressions of hearty good fellowship with which he was welcomed. The transports arriving about the same time, the army of thirty thousand men was embarked, and on the 20th of December the combined force started down the river. In McClernand's absence Sherman retained the command.

It was on the passage down that the Black Hawk, leading the advance, fell in with the Marmora, and Selfridge went on board the flag-ship to report. It was the first intimation that had reached Porter of the disaster—the only disaster that had happened since he had assumed command. It was the worst kind of a blow at the very outset of the campaign. All this was fully realized by the sensitive young officer, who saw the prospects of his career blasted at its opening; and indeed, with an ordinary commander-in-chief, it would have been the end of Selfridge's service, at least in that squadron. But Porter was not an ordinary commander-in-chief. No man was quicker than he to detect in other men the true elements of strength and weakness, and he saw at once the real stuff of which the unfortunate lieutenant before him was made. He saw that the fault, if fault there was, lay in impetuosity and excess of zeal—qualities which he was much more disposed to foster in his officers than to repress. He listened gravely to the story, meanwhile measuring his man, and at its close he had made up his mind. Not a word of impatience or irritation escaped him; only a single comment, made in that confident and cheerful tone that characterized him in the most depressing sur-



roundings: "Well, you have lost your ship; we must give you another." This was all; and in fact, Selfridge was immediately ordered to the command of the *Conestoga*.

We have dwelt upon this incident at some length, because it illustrates forcibly one of the most marked traits in Porter's character, and helps to explain that intense personal devotion which was felt and shown by all the officers who served under him, and in a great degree by the whole navy of the war period. He never did anything to stamp out individuality in his juniors, to repress their zeal, to cool their ardor. On the contrary, he stimulated and encouraged them to an extraordinary degree. This was all the more noticeable since he had been brought up under the opposite system, had himself been the object of a stupid and restrictive discipline, and had reached at a single bound the highest command after nearly a lifetime of subordination and repression. The remarkable thing about him is that he so rose above his training and his surroundings, so completely emancipated himself from the stifling routine in which his life had been passed, that he made for the service a new atmosphere, and, more than any one else of his time, was the creator of a new idea of naval discipline, which looked rather to the personality of the officer than to his rank, and which sought to expand and develop the whole body instead of relying for the springs of action upon those whose springs had long since worn out.

Whatever the admiral might say to Selfridge, he felt severely the loss of the ship. The *Cairo* was one of the seven ironclads which formed the principal reliance of the squadron, and which alone with the *Benton* were built to withstand the attacks of artillery. All these vessels had passed through the campaign of the previous





The flag-ship Black Hawk.



spring, including the battles of Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, Island No. 10, Fort Pillow, and Memphis; and while they had suffered more or less in these engagements, none of them had up to this time been seriously injured. But it was a cardinal principle with Porter that ships must be risked when the occasion required it; and the occasion had seemed to require it with the *Cairo*. He reported to the department: "I do not see anything to reprehend in the course of Lieutenant-Commander Selfridge except being rather incautious. His vessel was a great loss to us; she was in splendid order, and had just been made shot-proof with railroad iron where she was before vulnerable. He is too good an officer to lose his services just now, and I have put him in command of the *Conestoga*, which was vacant, trusting that he may be more fortunate hereafter, this being the second time during the war his vessel has gone down under him. . . . This affair will give me some extra trouble, but I hope to succeed, nevertheless, though this leaves me only six vessels that can go under a battery."

On the 23d the expedition found itself at the mouth of the Yazoo River. No sooner had Porter arrived than he sent up a strong force, composed of the *Benton*, the *Tyler*, and the *Lexington*, two of the rams, and three of the light-drafts, to secure landings for the army and to finish the work of removing the torpedoes. This was continued for four days, under a constant fire of sharpshooters on the bank, until the squadron had arrived in the neighborhood of Haynes's Bluff at the point where the line of hills running north from Vicksburg strikes the Yazoo. Here it found the heaviest batteries of the enemy that it had yet encountered, while its farther progress was stopped by the obstruction, consisting of a huge raft, framed with large timbers, and covered with railroad

iron, which was braced diagonally in successive lines to both banks of the river. On the 27th, the vessels having come up to the obstruction, the Benton engaged for two hours in a vigorous attack upon the forts. The ship, which was tied to the bank, was badly battered, being hit thirty times, and her captain, Gwin, an officer whose previous service had given him a high reputation for skill and gallantry, was mortally wounded. It was demonstrated that the position of the forts at Haynes's Bluff was such that they could not be taken without the cooperation of the land forces, while the heavy barrier made the narrow river impassable.

In a short time General Sherman had landed his army under cover of the gunboats in the bottom-land near the Yazoo mouth, where it was directly under the fire of the entrenchments on the hills and where the innumerable bayous and swamps rendered maneuvering almost impossible. On the 29th the army assaulted the works. Two brigades succeeded after incredible difficulties in reaching the crest of the ridge, but being unsupported by the remainder of the army, owing to the difficulties of approach and certain incidental causes, they were compelled to withdraw, and the assault was abandoned.

During the night it rained heavily and the men bivouacked in the swamps, now almost inundated. In the course of the night Sherman came off to Porter's flagship to consult with him, and, feeling the necessity of new combinations, proposed a plan to which, as he says in his report, "Admiral Porter promptly and heartily agreed." This was to embark ten thousand of the best troops immediately after dark on the night of the 31st, and move the transports before daylight, under escort of the gunboats, slowly and silently up to the batteries at Drum-

gould's Bluff and engage them, the gunboats to silence the batteries, and the troops meanwhile to disembark and carry them by assault. While this operation was going on Sherman was to remain in his present position at Chickasaw Bayou and renew the assault to prevent the sending of reinforcements above; and if the attack on Drumgould's Bluff turned out favorably, to move all his forces to that point. The plan had in it some elements of promise, though the assault by the army would probably involve heavy loss of life. The troops were designated and embarked. The ram *Lioness* was fitted with an ingenious apparatus for breaking torpedo-wires and was to go ahead and clear the way, and torpedoes were provided for blowing up the raft. All was ready, but as midnight ushered in the New Year a dense fog settled down which lasted until morning. It was so thick that objects could not be seen at ten paces, and in the narrow river the gunboats could not move. The next night the moon would not set until half past five, so that the element of surprise would be wanting, and without this the operation was too hazardous to be attempted. The project was therefore abandoned, and on the night of January 1st Sherman's force was embarked in transports under cover of the gunboats, which checked the enemy's attempts to interfere with the operation.

Sherman's first idea was to disembark the army at Milliken's Bend, ten miles above the mouth of the Yazoo, and there await the expected arrival of Banks with a force from New Orleans, or that of Grant from Grenada. Banks, however, never started, and Grant's intended co-operation was prevented by the destruction of his depot at Holly Springs by Van Dorn on the 20th of December, which led him to fall back nearly to his former position in the neighborhood of Corinth, and in fact ended his

campaign east of the Yazoo Delta, and destroyed all hope of crushing Vicksburg by that line. As an alternative proposition Sherman had suggested to Porter that the army and fleet, being ready for a movement in any direction, should make an attack on Fort Hindman at the Post of Arkansas, which was the base of all offensive movements of the Confederates in the upper river and a constant menace to National control. It was to this refuge that the Blue Wing had been taken after her seizure, and its capture would amount virtually to the conquest of the State of Arkansas. To this proposal, according to Sherman, "Porter cheerfully assented."

After the embarkation was completed, on the morning of the 2d of January, a new turn was given to affairs by the arrival of General McClelland with orders to take command of the army. McClelland was an Illinois lawyer, of considerable professional and political prominence, to which, together with his success in raising troops, he owed his major-general's commission. Porter had seen him and talked with him in Washington, and had formed a just estimate of his character and ability. McClelland had done good service in command of a brigade during the campaign of the year before, but he was a dangerous man to place in command of an army. While he was not without considerable administrative force, he possessed no real military instinct or knowledge, and he was too much occupied in looking for military advancement through outside influences, and for the furtherance of outside ends, to make a good officer. While men like Logan and F. P. Blair were politicians, and able politicians, in the ranks of the army they became soldiers pure and simple; and despite their want of experience, they became good soldiers. But McClelland could never drop politics, and could never make a good

soldier. Of him and of all his kind Porter had an unmitigated scorn, which he was at little pains to conceal. Nor did it tend to soften his feelings that McClernand on his arrival sent for the admiral to come on board his transport. Porter replied that he was too busy to make calls, and notified Sherman that McClernand had come to supersede him.

The army was now moved up to Milliken's Bend and McClernand took command. He brought the first news of the capture of Holly Springs and the retreat of General Grant, which put an end to all idea of renewing the attack on Vicksburg. The army could not be landed at Milliken's Bend, which the recent rains had reduced to a swamp, no order had come from Grant, and Sherman, now only a corps commander, again brought up his suggestion of Arkansas Post. McClernand, having nothing better to propose, was inclined to assent, and on the following night came down to the Black Hawk to consult Porter, who was still guarding the mouth of the Yazoo, on the possibility of a cooperating naval force.

The discussion that followed in Porter's cabin has been narrated in substantially the same terms by Sherman and the admiral. The generals wanted gunboats, and asked that a captain should be named to command them. The admiral, however, had no intention of risking an expedition if its success was to depend on McClernand, and raised various difficulties. "Porter's manner to McClernand was so curt," says Sherman in his memoirs, "that I invited him out into a forward cabin where he had his charts, and asked him what he meant by it. He said that he did not like him; that in Washington, before coming West, he had been introduced to him by President Lincoln, and he had taken a strong prejudice against him. I begged him for the sake of har-



mony to waive that, which he promised to do. Returning to the cabin, the conversation was resumed, and on our offering to tow his gunboats up the river to save coal, and on renewing the request for Shirk to command the detachment, Porter said, 'Suppose I go along myself?' I answered, if he would do so, it would insure the success of the enterprise."

Porter's account is much the same, with the additional statement that his impatience with McClernand was due to the latter's gross discourtesy to Sherman, and that in reply to Sherman's remonstrance when they were alone the admiral said, "I don't care who or what he is, he shall not be rude to you in my cabin." Porter adds that he insisted that General Sherman should be in command, to which McClernand agreed, saying: "There is no objection, I suppose, to my going along?" To this Porter assented, and the expedition became a fixed project, the land forces of course being commanded by McClernand.

The vessels which Porter took with him on the expedition were carefully selected and comprised the following:

Flagship *Black Hawk*, Lieutenant-Commander K. Randolph Breese. Ironclads: *De Kalb*, Lieutenant-Commander John G. Walker; *Louisville*, Lieutenant-Commander E. K. Owen; *Cincinnati*, Lieutenant George M. Bache. Gunboat: *Lexington*, Lieutenant-Commander James W. Shirk. Light drafts: *Rattler*, Lieutenant-Commander Watson Smith; *Glide*, Lieutenant S. E. Woodworth. Ram: *Monarch*, Colonel Ellet.

Of these officers, Breese, Smith, and Woodworth had been with Porter in the mortar-flotilla at New Orleans; Owen and Shirk had been serving during Foote's and Davis's commands in the Mississippi squadron, where

both had made excellent records; and Walker and Bache were new to the river service, having joined the squadron with Porter.

Fort Hindman, or Arkansas Post, which was the object of attack, was a strong work on the left bank of the Arkansas River, fifty miles from its mouth. The river at this point makes a horeshoe bend, running first north, then east, and the fort was so placed at the head of the turn that its east or river face commanded the approach from below. It was a square fort, three hundred feet on a side, with bastions at the angles. On the river face were three heavy guns: one 9-inch in the northeastern and another in the southeastern bastion, and an 8-inch in the curtain connecting the two bastions, and midway between them. The guns were in casemates, with walls of heavy oak timber four feet thick, the roofs being covered with bars of railroad iron. There were also mounted on the platforms four 3-inch Parrott rifles and four 6-pounders. Half a mile from the fort on the side away from the river was an impenetrable swamp, and the intervening space was defended by a line of rifle-pits, with field-batteries, extending from the fort to the swamp. Batteries had also been thrown up at points on the river-bank below the fort to oppose an advance of troops along the levee. The works had a garrison of six thousand men under General Churchill, the fort proper being under the command of Colonel Dunnington, formerly an officer of the navy.

The combined expedition ascended the Mississippi, and to conceal its destination entered the mouth of the White River, from which it passed into the Arkansas higher up by a cut-off. On the night of Friday, the 9th, it arrived in the neighborhood of Arkansas Post, and on the morning of the 10th the army disembarked about

three miles below the fort. One regiment (Lindsay's) with some field-pieces was landed on the opposite bank. The line of outlying works near the levee was occupied in force by General Churchill with three thousand men, and presented a strong front, but while the army were disembarking Porter took up the Black Hawk and Rattler to a position opposite the enemy's trenches, and by a sharp enfilading fire compelled them to abandon the outworks and fall back on the inner line of entrenchments. As General Morgan, commanding the Thirteenth Corps, said in his report: "Had the enemy been well established in position, and had we been unaided by the gunboats, the enemy's position would have been strong; but the gunboats had an enfilading and reverse fire upon that line, and hence it was untenable."

Some delay occurred in the advance of the army by its making too wide a detour to get around the enemy's left, and becoming entangled in the morass. When it was learned, however, that the Black Hawk had succeeded in shelling Churchill's troops out of their advanced position, the division that had gone astray was countermarched, and the whole army advanced along the river-bank, passing over the deserted trenches, until it came upon a plateau of dry ground one thousand yards square. Here the army were forming on Saturday night. On the opposite side of the plateau was the enemy's main work, consisting of the fort on the river-bank and the line of entrenchments extending to the swamp.

Late on Saturday afternoon Porter received word from McClernand that the army was ready to assault. The message was a mistake, as the army did not get into position on the plateau until the following morning. The admiral immediately moved his fleet up until the advance

line reached a point four hundred yards from the fort, when he opened fire. The three ironclads, *De Kalb*, *Cincinnati*, and *Louisville*, formed in echelon, attacked the casemate batteries, while the *Black Hawk* and *Lexington*, with the light-drafts, threw in shrapnel and rifle-shell. When the vessels had become hotly engaged Porter ordered Watson Smith, in the *Rattler*, to pass the fort, for the purpose of cutting off the enemy's retreat, if the assault should be successful. This was done in the most gallant style, although the little tinclad suffered severely. But Porter never spared his ships. A heavy shell raked her from stem to stern, and her cabin works were knocked to pieces, but without disabling her. The attack was kept up till after dark, but as no assault took place the *Rattler* again passed the fort, extricating herself with difficulty from the pile-obstructions in which she had become entangled, and the squadron dropped down for the night.

On Sunday, the 11th, General McClelland again sent word that the army was ready for the assault, and at half past twelve the gunboats were in motion. At one o'clock they opened, and the army began its advance. Churchill had posted a strong detachment in a cluster of cabins outside the works. For two hours the line of troops more than half a mile long continued its forward movement with heavy loss and with varying fortunes. In this time it advanced some six hundred yards. By three o'clock it was still three hundred yards from the works. Here the attack seemed to hang fire. The losses at this time amounted to over one thousand in killed and wounded. General Morgan, commanding the left wing, says in his report that at this moment his entire line was engaged, and receiving word from Sherman that he was hotly pressed and in need of reinforcements, he ordered

the nearest division commander (A. J. Smith) to send as many regiments as he could spare. Smith himself was making no headway and could only send three regiments, which led Morgan to bring up his reserves, which he had left at the landing. "The fight," he says, "continued with sullen stubbornness." On the right wing matters were likewise at a pause. The wide belt of ground separating the assailants from the enemy's line was cut up by gullies and covered with fallen timber. "Into this," said Sherman, "the attacking columns dashed rapidly, and there encountered the fire of the enemy's artillery and infantry, well directed from their perfect cover, which checked the speed of our advance, which afterward became more cautious and prudent."

While the army was thus at a standstill, Porter at one o'clock had brought his fleet into action. He had made up his mind that this time, whether the army assaulted or not, the guns of the fleet should be fought for all they were worth. He stationed his ironclads in the same position as on the night before, assigning to Walker in the *De Kalb*, as his especial charge, the northeast bastion, to Bache in the *Cincinnati* the next casemate, and to Owen in the *Louisville* the upper bastion on the river front. Sherman, who at one o'clock was half a mile away on the extreme right of the line, listening for the attack of the fleet, said in his report: "I could not see the gunboats, and had to judge of their progress by the sound of their fire. This was at first slow and steady, but rapidly approached the fort and enveloped it in a complete hailstorm of shot and shell." Again the admiral did not spare his vessels; they must depend for their protection not on their armor, or on keeping out of the line of fire, but on the fury of their own attack. Finding that his signals could not be seen in the smoke, he left his

flag-ship and went aboard the tug *Thistle*, in which he moved in and out among the fleet and gave his orders in person. The *Thistle* was in the thickest of the fire, and an especial target for the sharpshooters who crowded the parapets of the fort. Porter was everywhere, and his vigor and energy infused themselves into his force. The smashing fire of the ironclads at short range tore out great rifts in the heavy oaken walls of the bastions, ripped off the iron bars, crashed into the roofs. The casemates were knocked into fragments. The ships, on their side, received a terrific pounding. The admiral had caused their armor to be slushed with tallow before going into battle, which saved them many times when the shot did not strike fairly, as it usually does not in action. Eight times the *Cincinnati* was struck on her pilot-house by 9-inch shell, which glanced off, as Porter said, like peas against glass. Even the little *Rattler* was struck twice on her light bow plating by similar shell, which flew upward without scratching the iron. The *De Kalb* was struck again and again with the same result, but the 9-inch gun directly opposite her by continued blows finally battered in the armor-plates on her forward casemate. Another struck one of her 10-inch guns in the muzzle, wrecking both the gun and the carriage, and another did the same for a 32-pounder. A plunging shot went through her deck and cut off one of the deck beams. The armor of the *Louisville* was unhurt, but two of the enemy's shells burst in her ports, killing and wounding a dozen of her crew. At one time the gunboat was on fire, but in the fury of the battle it was unnoticed by her people. Porter immediately laid the *Thistle* alongside, and sent on board *Ettringham*, the master of the tug, with his crew, who in a few minutes extinguished the flames. Shortly after fire was reported on the *Cincin-*



nati, and in an instant the admiral had again dashed up and put on board his tug's crew.

Meanwhile Porter ordered the Rattler to pass the fort, as before, and take a position where she could cut off the enemy's retreat and enfilade his works. Presently he sent up Woodworth, with the second light-draft, the Glide, and Ellet in the ram Monarch. All three made a dash past the fort, and opened fire from their station above. Lieutenant Shirk in the other wooden gunboat, the Lexington, did good work with his broadside from below, destroying a rifle-gun, which, as Porter said, "was boring him pretty effectually." At the same time the 8-inch gun in the center casemate of the fort was completely demolished by repeated blows from the Cincinnati. As three o'clock drew near the defense grew weaker, and gun after gun was silenced or destroyed. Even the musketry fire from the fort had ceased. Says General Morgan, speaking of the situation at this hour, "The gunboats had passed above the fort and opened a reverse fire, and all the guns in the fort were silenced but one." Says Sherman: "The gunboats could be seen close up to the fort, and I saw the admiral's flag directly under it. All artillery fire from the fort had ceased, and only occasionally could be seen a few of the enemy's infantry firing from its parapets." Says Churchill, the Confederate commander: "After a continuous fire of three [it was really two] hours they succeeded in silencing every gun we had with the exception of one small 6-pounder Parrott gun which was on the land side. Two boats passed up and opened a cross-fire upon the fort and our lines; still we maintained the struggle. Their attack by land was less successful; on the right they were repulsed twice in attempting to storm our works, and on the left were driven back



with great slaughter in no less than eight different charges."

Porter, finding that the promised assault did not take place, or that it was repulsed, and believing that he had reduced the fort, now determined to have an assault of his own from the water; and for that purpose he hastily moved up the Black Hawk and took on board Lindsay's regiment, which had been stationed during the battle on the point on the opposite side of the river. As he rounded to for the assault, to land his seamen with the troops directly at the fort, the gunboats renewed their furious cannonade; but before the Black Hawk could get in a white flag was raised on the fort and Porter ordered the firing to cease. At the same moment white flags were shown along the lines, and the army completed their advance and marched in over the rifle-pits. Dunnington, in immediate command of the fort, surrendered to the admiral in person. The entire garrison of six thousand men were made prisoners; besides which there were captured seventeen guns, of which seven had been destroyed in the battle, three thousand small arms, and an immense quantity of ammunition and stores.

The action which resulted in the capture of Arkansas Post was one of the best conducted and most complete that the navy fought on the Western rivers. The theoretical ratio in value of fort guns to ship guns in those days was generally placed at four to one, which would have given the enemy a superior force in his three casemate guns over the forward batteries of the three ironclads, numbering nine guns in all. All the guns in the works but one small piece were silenced in two hours of fighting. The reduction of the fort, which brought about the surrender, was entirely the work of the navy. Porter with his usual cheerful frankness says in his report,

"Our army . . . were preparing to assault [the work], and would no doubt have carried it with ease." On the other hand, as Sherman says, "McClermand's report of the capture of Fort Hindman almost ignored the action of Porter's fleet altogether. This was unfair, for I know that the admiral led his fleet in person in the river attack, and that his guns silenced those of Fort Hindman and drove the gunners into the ditch."

McClermand's commendation, or the absence of it, was a matter of perfect indifference to Porter. No action in which he ever took part showed more vividly his fighting qualities as developed in their highest activity by the stress of battle. His unerring eye, detecting in an instant every point of strength or weakness; his cool and rapid judgment, his astonishing swiftness of execution, his intense physical energy, enabling him to supply in person the guidance, the encouragement, the stimulating example, the sudden burst of effort, at any and every point where one or the other might be needed; his willingness to use his force, even to the extent of using it up, to accomplish a sufficient result; and, finally, his indifference to personal danger and his readiness to expose himself to it in any form—were all displayed in the course of this short and resolute conflict. Whatever McClermand may have thought or said, the country recognized Porter's services; and for the capture of Arkansas Post he received by name the thanks of Congress, the highest honor which the Government of the United States can bestow on a victorious commander.

Immediately after the capture of the fort Porter sent the *De Kalb* and *Cincinnati*, battered as they were, up the White River to recapture the *Blue Wing*, if possible, and to clear out all positions of the enemy. The *Blue Wing* escaped, but the Confederate post at Duvall's

Bluff was destroyed and two 8-inch guns, which were being loaded on the cars, were captured, together with some prisoners. From that time on, the Arkansas and White Rivers ceased to be a source of molestation to the fleet and the transports.

## CHAPTER X

### THE FLANKING OPERATIONS IN THE YAZOO DELTA

IN the Vicksburg campaign the efforts of the fleet went hand in hand with those of the army. The movement planned by Grant for an advance through central Mississippi, upon the rear of Vicksburg, cutting off Haynes's Bluff, and forming a junction with the fleet on the lower Yazoo, had been brought to naught by contradictory orders from Washington, and by the destruction of the depot at Holly Springs. It was a most unfortunate ending, because Grant's original plan of the campaign, as is now generally admitted by military critics, was the true one, and it afforded the best method of approach to Vicksburg, and the most certain prospect of ultimate success at the least risk. It was far less hazardous than the plan that he was afterward compelled to adopt, of descending the river on the west bank, ferrying his army across, and making his attack from the south—a plan that he carried out with marvelous skill and success, in spite of its inherent difficulties. The latter plan was essentially dependent upon the efficient management of the fleet, without which it would have been impossible. That the army was enabled to execute it so successfully was due in no small measure to the untiring efforts of Porter.

Having failed with his expedition in the interior, Grant abandoned his line of operations and fell back on

Grand Junction. This was a few days before the attack on Arkansas Post, in which Grant had no part, and of which he was not aware until it was over. He resolved, however, with characteristic doggedness of purpose, that as the War Department had insisted on the river campaign as the main line of operations, he would make it so, and take command of it in person. Accordingly, on the 17th of January, a week after the capture of Fort Hindman, Grant joined the army and the fleet then lying at the mouth of the White River. He was further moved to do this by the fact that McClelland proposed a more extended campaign west of the Mississippi, which, as Grant said, would have been "a wild-goose chase into Arkansas," and upon which he did not propose that his splendid army should be frittered away. McClelland thus became relegated to the position of a corps commander.

Grant's army was now divided into four corps: those of Sherman, McPherson, and McClelland, which he had with him on the Mississippi, and that of Hurlbut, which remained at Grand Junction to hold the line of the railroad, while the direct operations against Vicksburg were conducted by the three other corps. At this time the Confederate forces were under the command of General Pemberton, in charge of the Department of Mississippi, with headquarters at Jackson; while General Stevenson was in immediate command at Vicksburg. Grant's general intention was now to make his attack on Vicksburg from the south, passing eastward to Jackson, and so getting a position in Pemberton's rear. To accomplish this he must by some means get his army below Vicksburg, and not only his army, but his transports and the fleet as well. This he hoped to effect by finding a water-route west of the river. The winter and spring of 1863 in

the Mississippi Valley were marked by unprecedented rains, which began at the time of Sherman's attack on Chickasaw Bluffs. In consequence, the river and its tributaries were unusually full, the alluvial bottom-lands back of the levees were everywhere overflowed, and such roads as existed were impassable. When Sherman's corps was stationed on the point opposite Vicksburg it was practically encamped on the levee, which was the only dry ground to be found, and his headquarters were only reached by a bridge. The army could not be marched down the west bank because marching was impossible in a submerged country, and a water-route was necessary that would be deep enough to float the transports beyond the southern extremity of the Vicksburg batteries.

The most obvious mode of obtaining a feasible route was by cutting a canal through the point opposite Vicksburg. The river here makes an elongated horseshoe bend, the city lying at the head of the turn, with a long tongue of land directly opposite, on the tip of which was the village of De Soto. By cutting a canal through the neck of this point the entire force, military and naval, could pass down with little exposure to the Vicksburg batteries. General Williams had begun the excavation during the expedition of Farragut the year before, but it had proved a failure. Great hopes, however, were entertained both at Washington and by General Grant that a renewal of the project would result in success. Porter had but little faith in it, and none at all in its construction on the original lines. As early as the 27th of January he wrote to Sherman:

One of my captains has been carefully examining the mouth of the canal, and very properly observes that there is a point jutting out above it that causes an eddy, and of

course prevents the strong current from pouring into the ditch. This point could be blown away in a very short time with powder, and if the canal is to be widened it will be done then. I am not sure that it will ever succeed where it is; at least I have always predicted that it would not, and a man likes to have his judgment turn out right. It certainly will not succeed unless it gets assistance. If it will not go fast enough there, I propose cutting another canal higher up; and when it is ready I would suggest cutting through the neck by Milliken's Bend, which is a very short distance. This will raise the water down here two feet at least, and it will go through with a rush. If this rain lasts much longer we will not need a canal. I think the whole point will disappear, troops and all, in which case the gunboats will have the field to themselves.

On the 28th he wrote to the Navy Department: "The present canal is simply ridiculous, and will never succeed until other steps are taken. It is improperly located in the first place, and is not properly cut in the second. . . . The beginning should be half a mile above the present mouth, and it should come out two miles below the lower opening. This would make the canal three miles long and leave the mouth entirely clear of any batteries the enemy might raise."

It is a curious fact that after the war the river itself accomplished what Williams first, and Grant afterward, attempted without success, and cut through the point so as to leave a mud-bank between the town and the deep waters of the channel. The troops continued working on the canal during the whole of February, but on the 7th of March the water suddenly rose, flooding the canal and destroying the works, whereupon the project was abandoned.

Long before this Grant had come to the same conclusion as Porter, and had lost all faith in the scheme



and turned his attention in other directions. From Lake Providence, near the west bank of the Mississippi, and forty miles up the river, connection might be made through a chain of swamps and bayous with the tributaries of the Red River. This route crossed half of the State of Louisiana, and would have brought the fleet half-way down to New Orleans, involving a detour of over four hundred miles, but with steamers the distance could be quickly traversed. The difficulty lay in the connection between Lake Providence and the Tensas, which for six miles passed through a cypress swamp, where the waters of the bayous were lost and which could only be deepened with great labor by excavation and by pulling up innumerable trees. This route gave occupation to a part of the army during the entire month of March, and even then it was not made practicable. As its difficulties developed, a third route was proposed by way of Duckport, a point opposite the Yazoo mouth. This route, starting with an opening of the levee, followed a line of tortuous bayous and brought up on the Mississippi thirty miles below Vicksburg. The bayous were shallow, and the troops were to be transported in flatboats. In April, however, before the flatboats could be procured, an examination disclosed the fact that the recent fall in the river had left solid ground on the west bank, in the territory which had before been overflowed, and as the distance was short, Grant decided to drop the water-routes entirely and to march his army down on land.

Notwithstanding Grant's leaning from the start toward the plan that he ultimately adopted of moving against Vicksburg from below, the difficulties of transportation, so discouraging in February and March, drew the attention of the general and the admiral to the Yazoo Delta, in the hope that they might here secure a

position from which to operate on the enemy's right flank. Whatever operations were attempted must be carried out in large part by water, owing to the condition of the country, and the cooperation of the gunboats was therefore essential. Out of this effort to turn the enemy's flank above Haynes's Bluff arose those original and daring, though by no means quixotic schemes, the two bayou expeditions, in the second of which Porter took so large a part, and which only by his personal energy and resource was saved from overwhelming disaster. They seemed desperate chances, but the army during these two hopeless months was driven to take chances, and the stake was worth the risk. Had the Yazoo Delta, with all its topographical intricacies, been thoroughly known to the Union forces they might perhaps have been prosecuted with better hope of success, or perhaps they might never have been undertaken; but to Grant and Porter it was a *terra incognita*. It was at this time a half-submerged wilderness, five thousand square miles in extent, which was neither land nor water, but both land and water at the same time, and in which parts of it that were land to-day might be water to-morrow, and *vice versa*.

The district known as the Yazoo Delta was two hundred miles long, and extended from Yazoo Pass at the north to the mouth of the Yazoo River, just above Vicksburg. It was oval, or rather like a huge lance-shaped leaf, in form, and was bounded on its western side by the Mississippi, and on the east by the Yazoo and its tributaries. It contained three well-defined streams running from north to south through a great part of its length, all of which were fairly deep. These, as well as all other streams in the region, with the exception of the Sunflower River, were narrow and inconceivably tortuous, often splitting into two or three branches to reunite farther

on, and everywhere connected by an infinite number of watercourses, some of them of considerable depth, others of almost none, but the whole forming a labyrinthine network of channels in which only one having an intimate knowledge of the country could find his way. Most of them were not streams in the ordinary sense, but bayous or natural depressions filled with water, which might have been once, and might again become, the actual course of rivers. There were no cities in the Delta; indeed, the only towns—which had been largely deserted by their inhabitants—were Greenville on the Mississippi bank and Greenwood on the Tallahatchie, the principal feeder of the Yazoo. These lay sixty miles apart on opposite sides of the Delta, and at its widest point. Far away to the southeast on the Yazoo River, at the edge of the Delta, was Yazoo City, the arsenal and navy-yard of the Confederates. This part of the district differed essentially from that on the western side. The latter, except for a fringe of plantations on the Mississippi, was filled with a thick forest of cypress and cottonwood, with a tangled, impenetrable undergrowth, for the most part overflowed, and often without any footing of hard ground. The forests lined the banks of the watercourses, and the overarching tree-tops, almost shutting out the light of day, converted them into low and tortuous tunnels, in which navigation was difficult, while the movement of the troops on land during this winter of excessive rains was so restricted as to be almost an impossibility. It was a country where, if one traveled in a boat, the boat went through forests so dense that he could hardly see for the darkness, and where, in threading the intricate network of winding streams, he might pass suddenly from a channel several fathoms in depth to a mere ditch filled with fallen timber, or, worse still, with growing trees; while to one traveling on land,

the path might at any moment be entirely closed up by the undergrowth or by the black waters of a bayou, if indeed there was any path at all. In the eastern part of the Delta, however, near the Sunflower and between it and Deer Creek, there were clearings and plantations, chiefly along the banks of the main streams; and in this neighborhood considerable areas of dry land were to be found, so that troops could maneuver readily enough, if they could penetrate the valley on the west. The plantations were prosperous, and made this part of the Delta a very provision chamber to Vicksburg, filled with stores of grain and growing crops and cattle. At a little later date, in April, when the locality had become better known and the waters had subsided, General Steele landed at Greenville, and in a raid lasting only a few days destroyed half a million bushels of corn and brought back with him a thousand head of cattle. But at the time of the flanking expeditions the water was high and the features of the valley were still unknown, and as their success depended upon surprise, extended reconnaissances would have defeated their object.

The first attempt in the Yazoo Delta was the Yazoo Pass expedition. Two hundred miles above Vicksburg, at the extreme northern end of the Delta, and opposite Helena, was Moon Lake, one of the crescent-shaped sheets of water representing an old bend in the Mississippi. A bayou called Yazoo Pass connected this lake with the Coldwater River in the upper part of its course. The Coldwater, emptying into the Tallahatchie and the Tallahatchie again into the Yazoo, formed the eastern boundary of the oval valley. At some earlier period Moon Lake had been connected with the Mississippi, and at that time the passage from the river to the pass and the connected streams had been the ordinary route

from the northward to Yazoo City. This route had been closed by the building of the levee, which alone separated the waters of the Mississippi from those of the interior streams. The plan was to cut the levee and send in an expedition, composed of gunboats and troops in transports, which, after entering Moon Lake and the Yazoo Pass, should descend the Coldwater, the Tallahatchie, and the Yazoo, and take Yazoo City in the rear, establishing a base above Haynes's Bluff, at which a landing could be effected by the army. Porter hoped much from this expedition, which was largely his own suggestion. He said, just after it started, in a report to the Secretary of the Navy of February 7th: "If this expedition is successful in getting through, General Grant will follow with his army and Vicksburg [be] attacked in the rear in a manner not likely [to be] dreamed of; the troops at Vicksburg will be obliged to evacuate, as they have heretofore other strongholds. That accomplished, Port Hudson must fall, and if I have the gunboats I could keep the river open."

The force which Porter designated for the purpose consisted of six tinclads, the *Rattler*, *Marmora*, *Signal*, *Romeo*, *Petrel*, and *Forest Rose*, two rams, the *Lioness* and *Fulton*, and two ironclads, the *Chillicothe* and *De Kalb*. The *De Kalb* was still commanded by Walker, one of Porter's best captains. The *Chillicothe*, under Lieutenant-Commander Foster, was a new ship, and great things were expected of her, but she turned out, owing to bad workmanship, to be one of the most vulnerable vessels in the squadron. The route of the expedition took it nearly four hundred miles from Vicksburg in its round-about course. It was impossible for Porter to withdraw himself so far and for so long a time from the center of operations, where his presence was constantly needed.

He therefore could not accompany the expedition. If he had gone it would have had a different ending, as a comparison of its management with that of the attack on Arkansas Post abundantly shows.

It was foreseen that, owing to the delays and difficulties of communication, the expedition, once started, would have to rely chiefly on itself; and for this reason the admiral sent in command one of his most trusted officers, Lieutenant-Commander Watson Smith of the *Rattler*, who had shown such gallantry and dash at the capture of Fort Hindman. Unfortunately, Smith was at this time—although the fact was not known—on the eve of a fatal illness which prostrated him before the expedition was over, and which, shortly after it began, appears to have sapped his energies and to have rendered him incapable of the vigorous action which the movement called for. To this and to the delays at the entrance of the pass the failure of the expedition must be set down. The one point upon which Porter dwelt in his orders to Smith was the necessity of despatch. The orders were peremptory, and urged upon him the importance of pushing on, directing him by no means to delay, as the success of the expedition depended on rapidity of movement.

On the 2d of February work was begun by the engineers on the levee, and in two days the greater part of it had been cut through, leaving only a small dam to keep out the water of the river, which was eight feet higher than the adjoining lake. On the evening of the 3d a mine was exploded in the dam, and with a mighty rush the waters of the Mississippi poured like a raging torrent into the lake and the streams beyond. They flooded the morasses and the lowlands, overflowing forests of sycamore and cottonwood and cypress swamps, crushing



through trees and canebrake and driving beasts and reptiles from their dens. It took five days for the waters to subside to their level. Unfortunately, it had not occurred to the army officers in charge of the work to take possession of the pass between Moon Lake and the Coldwater. On the 10th the vessels entered the lake, but the Confederate forces, knowing well the possibilities of the country, had obstructed the bayou by felling trees, which required several days to remove. This work was only completed on February 21st.

At this date the flotilla was at the entrance of the pass ready to make the descent. Even after the fortnight's delay, had Porter's orders been carried out, the expedition would have been a most brilliant success. Nevertheless, fifteen days elapsed before it had covered the sixty or seventy miles to the mouth of the Tallahatchie. It is true that difficulties were encountered on the way down. The overhanging trees caught and tore the smoke-stacks and upper works of the vessels, and the innumerable short turns in the rivers led to frequent bumping of the gunboats against the bank. The *Romeo* carried away her smoke-stacks and the *Petrel* her wheel, and the other gunboats suffered some injuries, but, except with the *Petrel* and the *Romeo*, none of these were serious. Smith, however, advanced with extreme slowness. Foster and Walker, commanding the ironclads, urged him to push ahead. Colonel J. H. Wilson, the engineer officer who cut the levee and whose reputation for alertness and rapidity of movement in his subsequent career was unsurpassed, used every argument to hasten forward the squadron. General Ross, commanding the troops, did the same thing; yet fifteen days were consumed in doing what might easily have been done in three, and the expedition only arrived at Greenwood on the 11th of March.



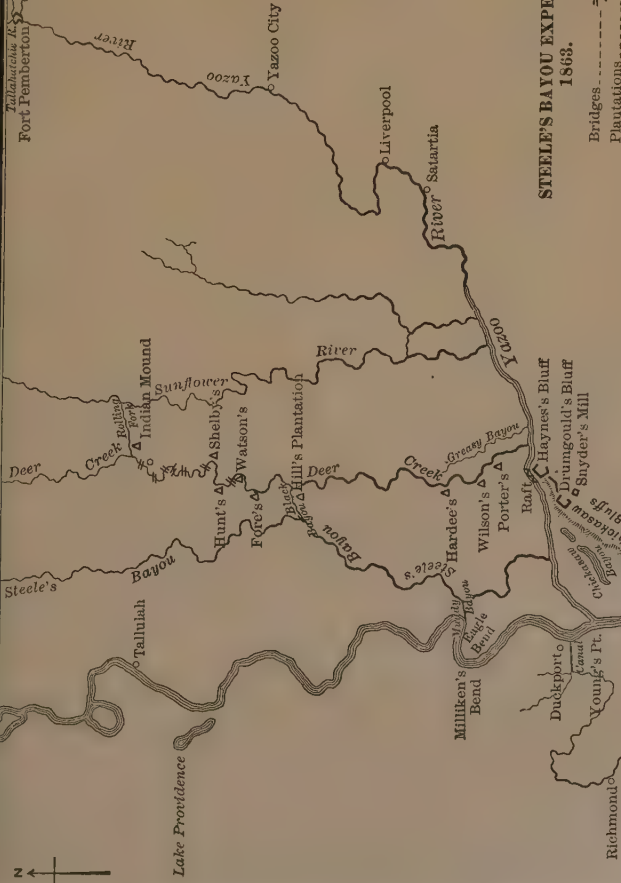
Meantime the enemy had been preparing for defense. Relying upon the obstructions in the Yazoo Pass, they had not at first taken any steps to fortify the river below, but when the obstructions were overcome a detachment of troops under General Loring was sent from Grenada, guns were brought up from Yazoo City, and a site for a fortification was selected with great judgment and skill on the neck of land where the Tallahatchie receives the waters of the Yallabusha and itself merges in the Yazoo. At this point the river was narrow, and a barrier had been placed across it just below, consisting in part of the hull of the steamship *Star of the West*, which, after the first Sumter expedition, had been seized by the Confederates, and on the capture of New Orleans had found a refuge in the Yazoo. Owing to a long bend in the stream, the fort adjoined the river both above and below; and while its front faced the enemy, its rear had uninterrupted water communication with Yazoo City and Haynes's Bluff. It was only on the 21st of February that Loring with two regiments arrived at Greenwood and began the erection of his fort, which he called Fort Pemberton—a line of works rudely constructed of earth and cotton-bales. Guns were hastily sent for and placed in position, but only one heavy gun, a 6½-inch rifle, could be obtained, and the rest were 32-pounders or 20-pounders. There was no carriage for the heavy rifle, and it was only placed in position by blocking just as the gunboats came in sight. Had they been a day earlier the fort would have been defenseless. Even after it received its guns, it is hard to see why it was not captured.

On the day of their arrival the two ironclads attacked the fort, and the attack was renewed at intervals on the following days. Shortly after an 8-inch gun was added to the armament. The *Chillicothe* in her encounters

showed only too plainly the bad work in her construction, and, being unable to sustain the fire of the enemy's guns, Foster reported her a failure as a fighting vessel. The ironclads were maneuvered with difficulty, having to fight bow on and headed down the narrow stream. Although there were four thousand troops, the ground was unfavorable to a direct attack, and the battery which they threw up had no effect. After a few days' pause the expedition withdrew. Meeting with reenforcements under General Quinby on the Coldwater, it returned again to Fort Pemberton, but nothing further was accomplished, and on the 5th of April the entire force was recalled.

Before the termination of the Yazoo Pass expedition a new enterprise had been planned by Grant and Porter with the same object, namely, to strike the enemy on his right flank above Haynes's Bluff. This was the Steele's Bayou expedition, the most extraordinary undertaking of the kind that was attempted by the Mississippi squadron, and, it might almost be said, that was ever attempted by any squadron. On the 14th of March Porter had cautiously pushed a reconnaissance forty or fifty miles up Steele's Bayou, a stream which ran from north to south through the whole length of the Yazoo Delta in its western and uninhabited half, and which emptied into the Yazoo River a short distance above its mouth, opposite the place where Sherman had landed in the attack on Chickasaw Bluffs. As far as he went Porter found navigable water, and the idea presented itself that, by following the intersecting streams eastward from Steele's Bayou, gunboats might be brought out at a point on the Yazoo above Haynes's Bluff. Grant eagerly adopted this suggestion. At this time he was anxious about the safety of the Yazoo Pass expedition, which had

Tallahatchie R.  
Fort Pemberton  
Yallahusha R.  
Greenwood



# STEELE'S BAYOU EXPEDITION, 1863.

Bridges -----  
Plantations -----





started early in February. It had reached the Coldwater three weeks before, and was known to have passed down the stream, following the eastern boundary of the Delta. More than two weeks had now elapsed without any positive information from it. It appeared from Vicksburg papers and other indirect sources that there had been an engagement with the newly constructed rebel fort at Greenwood, there being rapid and easy communication between Snyder's Mill and Greenwood by means of the Yazoo River; but the result of the engagement was still in doubt, which occasioned some anxiety.

General Grant, writing on March 16th to McPherson, said of the new project of an advance through Steele's Bayou: "The enemy have sent up reenforcements from Vicksburg and some more guns. If we can get our boats in the rear of them in time it will so confuse the enemy as to save Ross's force. If they do not, I shall feel restless for his fate until I know that Quinby has reached him." A few days later Grant wrote to Farragut: "Hearing of this force at Greenwood and learning that the enemy were detaching a large force from Vicksburg to go and meet them determined Admiral Porter to attempt to get gunboats in the rear of the enemy." This, therefore, was the primary object of the Steele's Bayou expedition. It was to create a diversion on the Yazoo in favor of Ross, then engaged in the attack on Fort Pemberton, with the intention that, if successful, it should be made the main operation. Grant wrote to McClernand: "My efforts to get down steamers to carry troops to the support of Ross in time have proven somewhat abortive. It is necessary, therefore, to give him aid from here. Admiral Porter, who was equally interested and much more familiar with the country intervening between the Mississippi and the Yazoo, caused a partial exploration of the passes through

by the way of Steele's Bayou to Deer Creek, and thence to the Yazoo, for the purpose of getting in the rear of any force that may have been sent up. I went with the admiral on his second excursion, and, so far as explored, *know it to be perfectly practicable*. I am therefore sending an infantry division to their support at Admiral Porter's request, and hope such favorable reports will be received as to justify me in sending all available forces through by that route." He adds that he has "countermanded the order for General McPherson to go through Yazoo Pass, on account of the difficulty of procuring the right kind of transportation and because it is now too late, and will bring him with this end of the expedition." This letter was written on March 18th.

The result of the expedition was only doubtful on account of the uncertain character of the route through the streams of the Yazoo Delta. A complete reconnaissance was out of the question, for the appearance of any kind of craft in Deer Creek would be at once reported at the enemy's headquarters at Vicksburg. Whatever might be the character of the interior streams, all of them, except the Sunflower, could be easily obstructed by a small body of troops, and the possibility that in the confusing network of bayous the gunboats might be entrapped and cut off was so great that it was imperative that an infantry force should be present to support the gunboats and prevent the placing of obstructions. Without this support Porter would not have made the attempt; and this was fully understood between himself and General Grant, as is shown by the letter to McClernand above quoted. The general was also aware of the importance of celerity. The expedition was an experiment, undertaken in the first instance to assist that from the Yazoo Pass, to divert the attention of the enemy, and avert what seemed a

probable disaster; but in the event of success, its results would be of the utmost importance, leading ultimately and surely to the fall of Vicksburg.

From information given by negro fugitives, which, as usual, was imperfect and not altogether to be relied upon, Porter gathered enough to see the strong possibilities of success, and the immense advantages that would result from it. He learned that there were three principal streams running through the Delta from north to south and emptying into the Yazoo: the westernmost, Steele's Bayou, near the Yazoo mouth; the second, Deer Creek, just above Haynes's Bluff; and the third, the Sunflower River, still farther above Haynes's Bluff, and between that point and Yazoo City. Steele's Bayou was connected with Deer Creek by a transverse passage four miles long called Black Bayou, and Deer Creek was connected with the Sunflower by another passage seven miles long, known as the Rolling Fork. The Sunflower was a broad and deep river, navigable for large vessels, and in Rolling Fork the navigation was fairly good. Deer Creek was bordered by plantations and crossed by a number of bridges, and was represented also to be navigable; while its eastern bank, as well as portions of the land between it and the Sunflower, was practicable for infantry operations. After passing through Black Bayou into Deer Creek, "we were told," says Porter, "that there would be no more difficulties." Had this been the case, the expedition would have settled the fate of Vicksburg. From what Porter had seen of Black Bayou he decided that, although much encumbered with overarching trees, a way could be made through it. The vital point, however, was to obtain the cooperation of troops and keep off possible attacks of the enemy. The route, as nearly as could be discovered, comprised the ascent of Steele's



Bayou for forty miles, the passage through Black Bayou of four miles, the ascent of Deer Creek thirty miles to Rolling Fork, the seven-mile passage through Rolling Fork, and the descent of the Sunflower River for fifty miles to its confluence with the Yazoo—the whole making in ordinary navigation a journey of perhaps twenty-four hours, but certain, under the peculiar conditions to be encountered, to take very much longer.

On Sunday, the 15th, the admiral started up Steele's Bayou with the expedition, of which he took command in person. It was composed of five ironclads, four mortar-boats, and four tugs. The ironclads were:

Carondelet, Lieutenant Murphy; Cincinnati, Lieutenant-Commander Bache; Louisville, Lieutenant-Commander Owen; Mound City, Lieutenant-Commander Wilson; Pittsburgh, Lieutenant Hoel.

General Grant accompanied Porter in the gunboat Price in a rapid ascent for thirty miles up Steele's Bayou, and, being satisfied that the route so far was practicable, returned to his headquarters at Young's Point, opposite the Yazoo mouth, arriving there on Monday morning. Here he immediately issued orders to General Sherman to "proceed as early as practicable up Steele's Bayou and through Black Bayou to Deer Creek, and thence with the gunboats now there by any route they may take to get into the Yazoo River, for the purpose of determining the feasibility of getting an army through that route to the east bank of that river." General Grant also directed him to send up two transports with troops, informing him that other transports would be supplied as fast as they would be required and could be got. Sherman thereupon embarked the Eighth Missouri Regiment with fifty pioneers on board the transport Diligent. Grant's

orders were to "push on until they reach Black Bayou, only stopping sufficiently long at any point, before reaching there, to remove such obstructions as prevent their own progress." Another transport, the *Silver Wave*, was similarly occupied in the lower part of Steele's Bayou, at a point where the trees somewhat obstructed the passage. Orders were also given for the movement of Stuart's division of Sherman's corps, comprising three brigades, the first under Colonel Giles A. Smith, to which the Eighth Missouri belonged, the second under Colonel T. Kilby Smith, and the third under General Ewing—altogether about six thousand men.

While General Grant returned to the Yazoo mouth Porter pushed his advance, relying on the promise of co-operation by the troops, to Black Bayou, through which he was to pass into Deer Creek. The water in Black Bayou was deep, but the passage was only just wide enough for the gunboats, and the trees encroaching upon the banks of the stream seriously obstructed the movements of the vessels. The turns were sharp, and it was necessary to heave the gunboats around the bends. The crews were kept at work clearing the way, pulling up trees by the roots and cutting away the overhanging branches, while occasionally it was necessary to push over the trees, rooted only in a spongy soil, by ramming with the iron-clads. By the afternoon of Monday, the 16th, the fleet had passed through Black Bayou. A short time before, being then within a quarter of a mile of Deer Creek, Porter, to make assurance doubly sure, sent a despatch to General Grant, which the latter received that evening at Young's Point, asking him to send a force of three thousand men to act with the fleet.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Grant to Halleck, March 17, 1863. War Records, Army, xxiv, 1, 21.

Early on the morning of the same day (Monday, the 16th) General Sherman had obtained the tug Fern from Captain Breese, and making his way up without difficulty, passed the Diligent with the pioneers and the Eighth Missouri on board, and overtook the squadron just as it was turning from Black Bayou into Deer Creek. At this point was a plantation known as Hill's, at which Sherman, at the admiral's request, agreed to land his troops, to hold the position, the pioneers in the meantime continuing the work of clearing Black Bayou, already partly effected by the passage of the gunboats. Porter and Sherman ascended Deer Creek in the Fern for three miles, as far as Fores' plantation. Sherman then returned to the Diligent, and arranged for landing the Eighth Missouri at Hill's plantation. He found solid ground half-way up Black Bayou, and taking advantage of this landing-place, had the regiment ferried two miles up the bayou by using a tug with a coal-barge in tow. Here it found the landing, from which it marched the remaining two miles to the plantation, where it went into camp. This was on Monday evening.

After Sherman started back the squadron continued on its way up Deer Creek. The admiral supposed, and had every reason to suppose, that the troops would move promptly; and that, as the east bank of Deer Creek, which Sherman had followed for three miles in the tug, afforded sufficiently hard ground for their operations, they would cover the gunboats as the latter ascended the stream, their advance reaching Rolling Fork before the flotilla. The distance from Hill's to Rolling Fork by the creek was thirty miles, but in a straight line alongside of it not more than fifteen or twenty.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, the 17th and 18th, the gunboats made snail-like progress in Deer Creek. The

navigation, which Porter had expected to find simple and easy, was the most difficult that he had yet encountered. Not only was the channel narrow and tortuous, with trees overhanging the bank and bridges at intervals across the stream—all of which difficulties could be overcome by persistent effort—but the bed of the creek itself was filled with growing willows with innumerable shoots, flexible but tough, that caught in every joint and crevice of the hulls and held the gunboats fast, so that they could move neither ahead nor astern. There was no way of avoiding the entanglement of the gunboats in these beds of withes, and their extrication involved immense labor. The stream became more narrow and winding than ever; so winding that Porter aptly described it by the illustration of “faking” a string up and down a piece of paper two or more hundred times. Every twenty minutes the vessels were turning upon their course. Most of the time, although formed in column ahead, all were steaming on different courses; one would be standing north, another south, another east, and yet another west, through the woods. The water was filled with logs that had lain there for years, making it necessary to keep working parties on the road that bordered the creek with tackles and hook-ropes to haul them out. From time to time a tree bending out over the water was rammed by the Carondelet, and after two or three blows would fall so that the sailors could remove it with their tackles on the bank. The progress of the squadron above Fores’ plantation was hardly half a mile an hour, and at times it was considerably less. The admiral, leading in the Carondelet, took upon himself the heaviest burden of removing the obstructions. The evening of Tuesday found him seven miles from Rolling Fork. Still the army did not arrive at Deer Creek, although it had had two days in

which to traverse only forty-four miles of navigable water. Nothing had come up except the single Missouri regiment, still in camp at Hill's.

For some weeks past the only Confederate force in the Yazoo Delta had been a small body of cavalry under Colonel Ferguson, which was encamped on Deer Creek, forty miles above Rolling Fork. He had also with him six field-pieces. On Tuesday, the 17th, Ferguson was joined by Morgan's battalion of sharpshooters, and his entire force now consisted of about three hundred and fifty men. Next day, Wednesday, the 18th, he received word that the gunboats were in Deer Creek, and started down with his whole force to Rolling Fork, using a steamer which by good luck happened to be at his camp. He arrived there on Thursday afternoon. He had already reported the presence of the gunboats in Deer Creek, and on the same day (the 19th) the report was received at Vicksburg. Featherston's brigade, composed of infantry and artillery, and numbering about one thousand men, was immediately despatched from Snyder's Mill by steamer up the Sunflower River and Rolling Fork, where they arrived on Friday, the 20th, and effected a junction with Ferguson late in the afternoon. This was more than five days after Porter started, and four days after he entered Deer Creek. As far as surprise was concerned, the expedition had been successful. A third Confederate force, comprising the brigade of General S. D. Lee, was landed at the mouth of Deer Creek to advance up the creek and attack the fleet in the rear. It proceeded only a short distance, however, to Hardee's plantation, where its movements were stopped by the impassable character of the country. It therefore had no effect on the situation.

In the meantime, what had been done to bring up the

Union forces? On Monday, the 16th, the day on which Sherman came up to confer with Porter, the Eighth Missouri, belonging to the First Brigade, that of Colonel Giles A. Smith, had landed at Hill's, where it had since remained. On Tuesday Stuart's division, comprising about six thousand men, embarked on transports, but, instead of following the route of the Eighth Missouri from the Yazoo mouth up Steele's Bayou, which would easily have brought it to Black Bayou in five or six hours, it was sent to Eagle Bend on the Mississippi, and there landed. At this point Steele's Bayou approaches by a short lateral channel called Muddy Bayou within a mile or two of the Mississippi, and it was intended to march the division across and embark them in transports on the bayou. The intervening neck of land was found to be overflowed, and twenty-four hours were lost in endeavoring to discover some other place to cross. Why this perfectly unnecessary obstacle was thus injected into the operation, in the face of the fact that one regiment had successfully passed through by the plain and obvious route to be taken, is inexplicable. Finally, a platform or bridge was built across the overflowed neck, and not until the evening of Thursday, the 19th, did the troops begin to move, and then only in small detachments. This colossal blunder, by which at least three whole days were wasted, marked the turning-point of the expedition. At this time, Thursday night, two more regiments of the First Brigade, the Sixth Missouri and One Hundred and Sixteenth Illinois, were embarked in transports and carried up to Black Bayou. They disembarked at the landing half-way up the bayou, and marched two miles to Hill's, where they joined the Eighth Missouri at four o'clock on the afternoon of Friday, March 20th. Here they remained, although they must have been able



to hear the guns of the squadron, only twelve miles away. This was the same day and hour at which General Featherston arrived to reenforce Ferguson. If the troops had entered Steele's Bayou from its mouth—certainly its most obvious entrance—the whole division of six thousand men might by this time have been at Rolling Fork.

We must now return to the squadron. By Wednesday morning it had arrived at a point on Deer Creek within seven miles (by the creek) of Rolling Fork. Here Porter was informed that the planters were forcing their negroes to cut down trees in the creek ahead of the squadron. This work was, in fact, started by the advance detachment of cavalry sent on by Ferguson. The admiral ordered Murphy, the captain of the *Carondelet*, to take the *Thistle*, which carried a boat howitzer, and move rapidly up the creek and put a stop to the tree-cutting. The *Thistle* reached the first tree before it was cut down and drove off the men at work. But in the meantime other parties of negroes were carrying on the work farther up, and at last succeeded in getting a tree directly across the stream, which stopped the progress of the tug. It then became an easy matter to cut down great numbers of trees beyond, and when the *Carondelet* came up her crew were set to work to clear the obstructions. At this they worked all night and finally succeeded so that the squadron could move ahead, but its progress was all the time becoming slower.

By the time the obstructions were removed, on the morning of Thursday, Porter's advance ship, the *Carondelet*, was within three miles of Rolling Fork. At this time Porter learned that Ferguson's force had arrived at Rolling Fork and were to dispute his passage. No sign yet appeared of Sherman's army. Porter therefore selected two hundred men from the gunboats and landed them,



with two howitzers, under Lieutenant Murphy, to hold the entrance to Rolling Fork against the attack of the enemy. Murphy was directed to take a position on an Indian mound situated near the angle between Rolling Fork and Deer Creek, the gunboats in the meantime redoubling their efforts to make progress. At the same time the admiral sent a pressing letter to Sherman to hasten his advance, under the supposition that the general was at Hill's plantation with Stuart's division. He said:

"We are within one mile and a half of Rolling Fork, having undergone an immensity of labor. Had the way been as good as represented to me I should have been in Yazoo City by this time; but we have been delayed by obstructions which I did not mind much, and the little willows, which grow so thick that we stuck fast hundreds of times.

"I beg that you will shove up troops to us at once. I am holding the mouth of Rolling Fork against Adams's [Ferguson's] troops, which have attacked our two hundred men. We have only two pieces of artillery; they have six, and two hundred men. [In fact, they had nearly double that number.] We should take possession here at once with the army. There is everything here the heart of a soldier could desire; everything in abundance. Please send; it takes all my men to defend the position I have taken. I think the distance is only fourteen miles by land. I shall look for these reenforcements. I send you a despatch from Captain Murphy. *Please send on troops.*

"I think a large force will be used to block us up here. We must have every soldier to hold the country, or they will do it. Our difficulties increase."

On the morning of Friday, the 20th, the situation of

the squadron was extremely critical, but the admiral, having perfect faith that relief was at hand and would arrive at any moment, and having been with Sherman at Hill's plantation, only a dozen miles below, four days before, prepared to continue his advance. Less than a mile remained between him and Rolling Fork. In this distance there were two or three large trees to remove and an apparently short lane of willows to work through. If Murphy's force could hold his position until the relief came that was momentarily expected all would go well. Porter knew that many trees had been cut down in Rolling Fork, but these could be removed, and the army, having dry ground to operate on, along Rolling Fork as well as Deer Creek, could dispose of the enemy's reinforcements, which had been or would be sent up from Snyder's. In fact, he could now see the smoke of steamers in the Sunflower. The country was one in which the army needed no rations; it abounded in well-stocked farms, with ample provisions for thousands of troops, as he had intimated in his letter. Once in the Sunflower, which was too broad and deep to be obstructed, he would have a clear path to the Yazoo River.

The first thing to be done was to remove the fallen trees in front, which was quickly accomplished. The lane of willows presented more serious difficulty. It was the worst obstruction that the fleet had yet met with. The Carondelet started to work ahead with her wheel, but she made little progress. The lithe trees defied her utmost efforts to get by them. Porter, nothing daunted, set his men at work to pull them up separately, and where this was impossible, to cut them off under the water. This was a most tedious operation, but it was carried out. It was necessary to clear the stream thoroughly, as the Carondelet went ahead, else she might become so firmly

embedded as to be unable to move in either direction. During the entire day the fleet was working its way through the lane of willows slowly, but nevertheless substantially.

In the meantime Ferguson's troops had got some of their field-pieces in position and three times made an attack on Murphy's intrenchments at the Indian mound. The attacks were cautious and desultory, and each time the enemy withdrew either to replenish his ammunition or in consequence of the fire from the gunboats, which gave Murphy careful and efficient support. In the afternoon, however, Featherston arrived with his brigade in Rolling Fork. This was precisely what Porter had foreseen, and he immediately despatched another and more urgent letter to Sherman. Featherston's arrival had put a new face on the situation. His artillery moved up and opened a brisk fire in front and in flank, where they could enfilade Murphy's position, and he was compelled to withdraw to the gunboats. In the meantime the Confederate infantry made a detour through the woods and reached the river-bank in the rear of the squadron, where they bivouacked for the night. The crisis was now approaching, and Porter fully realized it, but he expected that his second letter, if not his first, would bring the army up at any moment. Meantime he took the precaution of landing some of his men, and threw them out as pickets to prevent a surprise during the night.

On the morning of Saturday, the 21st, the situation of the squadron had become desperate. The Carondelet was now almost at Rolling Fork, though she had advanced but a quarter of a mile during the previous day. The enemy, taking advantage of every tree and stump and elevation on the river-bank, stationed sharpshooters so as to cover the gunboats completely with their fire.

No progress could be made through the willows without exposing the men at every moment and in great numbers on the banks and on the decks of the gunboats. The large force which had moved down through the woods the night before, and bivouacked on the river-bank below, which comprised both infantry and artillery, but of whose strength Porter was ignorant, had begun at daybreak to fell trees across the stream to cut off his retreat at the very point where he had with so much difficulty been removing them during the last two days. The ironclads, with their heavy guns mounted in the casemates forward and aft, were unfitted to resist, much less to repel, such an attack as was now directed against them. The army below showed no signs of approaching to their relief, no answer had been received to Porter's appeals, and it had become only too plain that there was no army below to relieve him.

Under these circumstances no doubt existed in the admiral's mind as to what was to be done. He was completely entrapped, caught like a rat in a hole; and although on the very eve of success, after overcoming innumerable difficulties and obstacles, he could not further imperil the vessels. Only by the greatest care and the utmost exercise of nerve and judgment would he now be able to extricate them at all. They were five of the best ironclads in his force. Their loss would mean the virtual destruction of the Mississippi squadron and would put an end to effective naval cooperation in the reduction of Vicksburg. The troops upon which he had relied as an essential part of the expedition had unaccountably failed him, and there was but one thing for him to do—to get out as quickly as possible. Accordingly, he ordered the vessels to unship their rudders—there was no room to turn—and backing their engines, to drop down

as best they could, keeping their place in the channel by rebounding from tree to tree. The men were kept strictly under cover, Porter himself using a large piece of quarter-inch iron plate as a protection from sharpshooters. The heavy guns, whenever it was possible, replied to the fire of the enemy on the banks. Fortunately the assailants, who felt confident of the final outcome, relying upon their obstructions in the creek below, and expecting further reenforcements, did not press their advantage as sharply as they might; but the outlook had become very black indeed.

When Sherman had parted from Porter on Monday night he had landed the Eighth Missouri at Hill's; and the next morning he started off alone in his tug, returned to Steele's Bayou, and steamed up that stream for many miles into the wilderness, in the vain hope of finding some other route by which Stuart's division could cross from the Mississippi. In this way he lost much precious time, and found nothing. He spent the best part of three days in futile examinations of the upper bayou and its tributaries. Not until the afternoon of Thursday did he return down Steele's Bayou to look after his troops. Arriving in the neighborhood of Eagle Bend, he found the two regiments of the First Brigade, the Sixth Missouri and One Hundred and Sixteenth Illinois, embarked at the head of Muddy Bayou and waiting orders to start. The rest of the brigade had gone off on another wild-goose chase, up the Mississippi to Tallulah, to look for another way across. All of which was singular indeed, considering that one regiment of the brigade, the Eighth Missouri, had reached Hill's by the natural route with so little difficulty on Monday. Sherman joined the two regiments that were ready, and while on the way up Steele's Bayou, at midnight of Thursday, he received Porter's

letter written the same day, which had come all the way back from Rolling Fork to find him. The troops were landed at Hill's on the afternoon of Friday, and Sherman remained with them. He failed to discover from Porter's letter, notwithstanding its urgency, the gravity of the situation; for instead of starting his men that afternoon, he wrote to Porter on Friday evening from Hill's:

FRIDAY EVENING.

DEAR ADMIRAL: I have about one thousand men here now, and think with good luck and hard work I may have another thousand to-morrow in the night, and will push till I get all of Stuart's division up. . . . Work on Black Bayou progressing well, but the crooks and turns are so short that boats can not navigate it with speed. Please write me by bearer, and give a receipt for the papers, as I have promised to pay him fifty dollars if he reaches you and returns safely. I have no doubt your channel will be obstructed, but no large force can assail you. Nothing from below to-day. Scouts and spies are feeling up their way from Haynes's Bluff, but I will watch them.

Yours,

SHERMAN.

Admiral Porter never got this letter, for the reason that its bearer was promptly captured by Featherston's cavalry, who digested its contents and forwarded it to Vicksburg, to which fact we are indebted for its preservation. Porter, however, having waited twenty-four hours in vain for an answer, had sent his second message on Featherstone's arrival on Friday. His messenger was more successful than Sherman's in reaching his destination, and delivered Porter's urgent letter to the general at Hill's at three o'clock on Saturday morning. Sherman, at last realizing the situation, aroused Colonel Smith and ordered him to start at daybreak with his three regiments, numbering altogether eight hundred men, being all the

force which had as yet arrived. On Saturday morning Smith accordingly set out, and marched his men up the east bank of Deer Creek to open communication with the squadron. They had advanced *only six miles* when they came upon trees that had been felled below the squadron to obstruct their retreat. All the negroes along the route had been notified to be ready at nightfall to continue the work. To prevent this Smith ordered the able-bodied negroes to be taken along, and warned the inhabitants that they would be held responsible for any further obstructing of the creek.

It was four o'clock on the afternoon of Saturday when Smith's detachment came up with the gunboats. They arrived none too soon. Approaching the fleet, Smith drove back the enemy's advance-guard, and, reaching the vessels, found them completely obstructed in front and rear. For the moment they were immovable. The Confederate lines of infantry, with artillery, entirely surrounded the squadron. "Every tree and stump," said Smith, "covered a sharpshooter ready to pick off any luckless marine who showed his head above decks, and entirely preventing working parties from removing obstructions." Porter turned over to Smith one hundred and fifty men, being all that were available from the squadron, together with the two howitzers, and requested him to retain a sufficient force to keep off the sharpshooters, and to distribute the remainder along the creek to prevent the further placing of obstructions during the night.

On the evening of Saturday the enemy were reenforced by the arrival from Vicksburg of the Fortieth Alabama, increasing their force to thirteen hundred men. Other reenforcements were expected, and it began to look not only as if the squadron would be unable to escape, but



Smith's little detachment would be captured. All of Sunday morning the gunboats kept on, slowly bumping down the stream, stopping every few moments to remove a tree, the parties of seamen working under the cover of Smith's skirmishers on the bank. Six miles had been made in this way by three o'clock in the afternoon. The fallen trees increased in number, and progress was slower hour by hour. About this time Featherston detached two regiments, the Twenty-second and Thirty-third Mississippi, to take position lower down in a point of woods running up to the creek, from which the Union forces could be advantageously attacked. The two regiments were observed filing along the edge of the woods on the creek a mile below Smith's column. At the same time the remainder of the Confederate force opened a fresh fire of artillery and small arms on the gunboats. The ironclads replied as their guns could be brought to bear. Farther down Deer Creek, Smith, on the night before, had stationed three companies to guard the creek, but these were now cut off by the enemy, and certain, as it appeared, to be captured. The Louisville, which had been in the rear, but which was now the leading boat, made tremendous efforts to work through the obstructions to rescue the detachment, now nearly surrounded. Smith also pressed forward with the main body, still leaving a fragment of his force to guard the fleet. Such was the situation on Sunday afternoon, when suddenly the enemy were discovered to be in retreat, and General Sherman in person with the Second Brigade and the remaining regiments of the First was seen advancing along the levee.

Sherman thus describes the event in his Memoirs:

On Sunday morning, March 21st [22d], as soon as daylight appeared, we started, following the same route which Giles

A. Smith had taken the day before, the battalion of the Thirteenth United States Regulars, Major Chase, in the lead. We could hear Porter's guns, and knew that moments were precious. Being on foot myself, no man could complain, and we generally went at the double-quick, with occasional rests. The road lay along Deer Creek, passing several plantations; and occasionally, at the bends, it crossed the swamp, where the water came above my hips. The smaller drummer-boys had to carry their drums on their heads, and most of the men slung their cartridge-boxes around their necks. The soldiers generally were glad to have their general and field-officers afoot, but we gave them a fair specimen of marching, accomplishing about twenty-one miles by noon. Of course, our speed was accelerated by the sounds of the navy guns, which became more and more distinct, though we could see nothing. At a plantation near some Indian mounds we met a detachment of the Eighth Missouri that had been up to the fleet, and had been sent down as a picket to prevent any obstructions below. This picket reported that Admiral Porter had found Deer Creek badly obstructed, had turned back; that there was a rebel force beyond the fleet with some 6-pounders, and nothing between us and the fleet. So I sat down on the door-sill of a cabin to rest, but had not been seated ten minutes when, in the wood just ahead, not three hundred yards off, I heard quick and rapid firing of musketry. Jumping up, I ran up the road, and found Lieutenant-Colonel Rice, who said the head of his column had struck a small force of rebels with a working gang of negroes provided with axes, who on the first fire had broken and run back into the swamp. I ordered Rice to deploy his brigade, his left on the road, and extending as far into the swamp as the ground would permit, and then to sweep forward until he uncovered the gunboats. The movement was rapid and well executed, and we soon came to some large cotton-fields and could see our gunboats in Deer Creek, occasionally firing a heavy 8-inch gun across the cotton-field into the swamp

behind. About that time a Major Kirby, of the Eighth Missouri, galloped down the road on a horse he had picked up the night before, and met me. He explained the situation of affairs and offered me his horse. I got on bareback, and rode up the levee, the sailors coming out of their ironclads and cheering most vociferously as I rode by and as our men swept forward across the cotton-field in full view. I soon found Admiral Porter, who was on the deck of one of his ironclads, with a shield made of the section of a smoke-stack, and I doubt if he was ever more glad to meet a friend than he was to see me. He explained that he had almost reached the Rolling Fork when the woods became full of sharpshooters, who, taking advantage of trees, stumps, and the levee, would shoot down every man that poked his nose outside the protection of their armor; so that he could not handle his clumsy boats in the narrow channel.

Notwithstanding the presence of troops—Sherman had now altogether between two thousand and three thousand men—it took the gunboats three days to get back to Hill's plantation, such were the difficulties of navigation and the labor of removing the fresh obstructions. It was not, however, the "clumsiness" of the boats that prevented the success of the expedition.

Another regiment, the Thirty-first Mississippi, joined the enemy on Monday, the 23d, but by this time Ewing's brigade (the Third Brigade of Stuart's division) had begun to arrive and Sherman's force was greatly superior in numbers. Nothing further took place beyond desultory skirmishes. The advance could not be renewed with any hope of success, as Deer Creek and Rolling Fork had been rendered impassable, the country was aroused, and reenforcements were daily arriving. If the Confederates had lost their chance of cutting off the gunboats, the Union army had likewise lost theirs of getting

through to the upper Yazoo. On the 25th Porter arrived at Hill's and immediately returned to the Black Hawk at the Yazoo mouth.

The failure of the Steele's Bayou expedition, one of the boldest and yet most certain of success of the movements undertaken for the reduction of Vicksburg, was clearly due to the utter lack of proper arrangements for the transportation of the army. The distance from the mouth of Steele's Bayou to Hill's plantation was only forty-four miles. The Eighth Missouri had gone up by that route in the Diligent, having started on Monday morning and arrived at Hill's in the evening. Not another man was landed there until Friday afternoon, when the Sixth Missouri and One Hundred and Sixteenth Illinois arrived. These regiments, with the remainder of Stuart's division, had been stuck in the mud at Eagle Bend during the greater part of the week. The remainder of G. A. Smith's brigade and the whole of the Second Brigade, with which the rescue of the gunboats was finally accomplished, started Saturday noon, the 21st, and arrived the same evening. The Third Brigade, Ewing's, which comprised the remainder of the division, were arriving during the 22d and 23d. Three transports were sufficient to carry them in seven trips, being the same transports that had been in use at the beginning of the expedition, the Diligent, the Silver Wave, and Eagle, all of which had been available during the whole week. From Hill's up the east bank of Deer Creek to the point where the gunboats turned back on Saturday was only about ten hours' march. Up to Thursday evening there was not a Confederate soldier in the neighborhood, and then only the detachment of Ferguson, numbering about three hundred and fifty men. On Friday afternoon another detachment arrived, and on Saturday evening a

third. But even at that time the total Confederate force numbered only thirteen hundred. Had the Diligent alone made trips on Tuesday and Wednesday similar to those which she had made on Monday, and had the men been sent forward as they arrived from Hill's plantation to keep in touch with the fleet, Porter would, beyond a doubt, have got into the Yazoo, captured Yazoo City, caused the abandonment of Fort Pemberton, effected a junction with the fleet and army at that point, and have secured a landing in the immediate rear of Vicksburg, with the Yazoo as a base. All this was prevented by sending Stuart's division to Eagle Bend instead of moving it by the natural and obvious route, by the mouth of Steele's Bayou. It is to be noticed that when the troops came down from Hill's on the return trip nobody dreamed of landing them at Eagle Bend, notwithstanding the elaborate roads and bridges that had been constructed there, but all followed the bayou to the Yazoo mouth, and so reached the Mississippi. Many of them came down on the gunboats, on which they might equally well have gone up.

It is but justice to General Sherman to say that, although he did nothing when he reached Hill's on Friday, after his three days' excursion in the Fern, he did, on the receipt of Porter's second letter, make vigorous efforts to get the troops up and exposed himself to great risks in so doing. From Tuesday to Thursday he had unfortunately gone off on a useless journey in the upper part of Steele's Bayou. There was no occasion, however, for reconnoitering in that quarter, when a perfectly practicable route had been found to Deer Creek through Black Bayou, over which the fleet had passed as well as part of the army, and where his tug would have been much better occupied in towing flatboats, scows, coal-barges—

anything, in short, that would ferry in repeated trips a number of troops through a narrow bayou two miles long. On Saturday morning, after he received the second letter, he sent forward Giles A. Smith, he himself remaining alone at Hill's during the day. On Saturday afternoon he took a canoe and paddled down Black Bayou to its mouth, where he found the three transports with the Second Brigade. These were disembarked at the same landing two miles below Hill's, and Sherman guided them that night through the canebrake to the plantation. This was the force with which he started on Sunday morning, and whose arrival on Sunday afternoon saved the fleet from impending destruction, though it was too late to retrieve the failure of the army to perform its allotted work.<sup>1</sup>

General Grant was fully sensible of the shortcomings of the army on this occasion. On the 23d, before he knew of the result of the expedition, he wrote to Porter:

Troops were promptly sent to Eagle Bend on the Mississippi River just where the bayou makes for the river to Steele's Bayou, and have made a good road across. It is not practicable to keep a large force on the land there, but there will be constantly as many as the boat suitable for

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<sup>1</sup> For the above history of the Steele's Bayou expedition reference is made to Sherman's reports of March 16th, 21st, and 29th, to the last of which Porter's first letter to Sherman is appended; Stuart's report, March 29th; Giles A. Smith's report, March 28th; Colonel Hoge's report, March 28th; report of Colonel T. Kilby Smith, commanding Second Brigade, March 27th; report of Colonel Rice, temporarily in command of Second Brigade, March 28th; report of General Hugh Ewing, commanding Third Brigade, March 29th; and reports of the regimental commanders. See also reports of General Stevenson, commanding at Vicksburg, General Featherston, General S. D. Lee, and Colonel Ferguson; War Records, Army, vol. xxiv, part i, pp. 431-467.

navigating Steele's Bayou can ferry. I have no more boats of the class required here to send. . . .

I will heartily cooperate with you in the present enterprise, so long as you deem it advisable to push it. Troops may have seemed slow in reaching you after your call, but all was due to the natural obstacles in the way of their reaching you earlier. I sent them promptly to Eagle Bend, having no more transports suitable to the navigation of the bayou, but the land from the Mississippi to Steele's Bayou was found covered with water and had to be bridged. This is now done, and there is no difficulty in getting them up there.

It was small consolation to Porter to know that by Monday, the 23d, the arrangements had been made for transportation which should have been completed exactly a week earlier, and which, as it happened, were entirely unnecessary, as the movement could have been successfully accomplished without them—a fact that had been perfectly well known since Monday night.

On the day after his return Porter made his report to the department, but, while stating the facts, he refrained with his usual forbearance from any recriminations. Indeed, he went out of his way to avoid reflections upon either Grant or Sherman, and his only imputation of blame is vaguely applied to the defective resources of the army. He says:

I look upon it as a great misfortune that this expedition did not get through, for it would have been a most perfect surprise—would have thrown into our hands every vessel in the Yazoo, and every granary from which the rebels could draw a supply.

The great difficulty seems to have been for want of more promptness in moving the troops, or rather, I should say, want of means for the moving of troops, for there were never yet any two men who would labor harder than Gen-



erals Grant and Sherman to forward an expedition for the overthrow of Vicksburg.

At one time I felt most uncomfortable, finding the enemy increasing in strength in front of me, cutting down trees behind me, and in front a chance of blocking up the feeders of the canal and letting the water out, and not a soldier of ours in sight, or (by the answers I received to my communication) any prospect of any coming in time to prevent a landing of the enemy. I never knew how helpless a thing an ironclad could be when unsupported by troops; our guns were three feet below the levee; the woods stood just far enough back to enable the sharpshooters to pick off our men, without our being able to bother them, except with the mortars, which kept them off.

The Steele's Bayou expedition was the last attempt to turn the enemy's right flank by way of the Yazoo Delta. As a strategic movement in the naval campaign it was brilliantly conceived and boldly and firmly executed. Perhaps more than any other exploit of Porter's career it shows his distinguishing qualities of daring and original conception, of consummate strategic judgment, of freedom from conventional limitations, of nerve and resourcefulness in a situation of overwhelming danger and difficulty. Had it received the prompt cooperation of the army, upon which it had every reason to rely and which was an indispensable element in its success, it would undoubtedly have turned the enemy's flank, and have changed the face of the Vicksburg campaign. All this became impossible, because during a period of six days the army failed to move two thousand men a distance of forty miles, up a perfectly navigable stream, on whose banks or waters not an enemy was to be found, and where six large gunboats and one of its own transports, of which three were available, had just passed through in less than twenty-four hours.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE FINAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST VICKSBURG

All attempts to penetrate the Yazoo Delta had now been abandoned, and attention was again turned to an attack from the river below, and to the mode of moving the army down the west bank. The new route, which had been just worked out, led through a succession of bayous from Duckport to New Carthage, fifteen miles below the last of the Vicksburg batteries at Warrenton. Thirty miles by the river below Warrenton, and therefore fifteen below New Carthage, a new position of great strength had recently been fortified by the Confederates at Grand Gulf; and it would therefore be necessary to go a stage farther, so that the army might be ferried across below and in the rear of Grand Gulf. As the success of the movement depended on the fleet, it also became necessary to have a force of gunboats in the river below; and for this purpose they must run the batteries of Vicksburg.

On the 29th of March Grant wrote to Porter:

I am about occupying New Carthage with troops, and opening the bayous from here to that place sufficiently for the passage of flats, a number of which I have ordered from St. Louis. With this passage open I can run the blockade with steamers sufficient to land troops, with the aid of flats, either at Grand Gulf or Warrenton, whichever seems most promising. Under these circumstances, is it not abso-

lutely essential that Warrenton and Grand Gulf should be so controlled by gunboats as to prevent further fortifications?

It looks to me, admiral, as a matter of vast importance that one or two vessels should be put below Vicksburg, both to cut off the enemy's intercourse with the west bank of the river entirely and to insure a landing on the east bank for our forces, if wanted.

Will you be good enough, admiral, to give this your early consideration, and let me know your determination? *Without the aid of gunboats it will hardly be worth while to send troops to New Carthage*, or to open the passage from here there.<sup>1</sup>

To this Porter replied on the same day:

I am ready to cooperate with you in the matter of landing troops on the other side, but you must recollect that when these gunboats once go below, we give up all hopes of ever getting them up again. If it is your intention to occupy Grand Gulf in force, it will be necessary to have vessels there to protect the troops or quiet the fortifications now there. If I do send vessels below, it will be the best vessels I have, and there will be nothing left to attack Haynes's Bluff, in case it should be deemed necessary to try it. It will require some little preparation to send these vessels below. Coal and provisions are wanted; they can not well do without.

With the force Farragut now has, he can easily dispense with one vessel to patrol the coast as far as Grand Gulf while we are preparing this thing. I will come over and see you.<sup>2</sup>

At the interview that followed between the general and the admiral the question of a direct attack on Haynes's Bluff was further discussed. It was only a week before that Grant had written to Banks: "This experiment [the Steele's Bayou expedition] failing, there is

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, Army, vol. xxiv, part iii, pp. 151, 152.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

nothing left for me but to attack Haynes's Bluff." The experiment had failed, and Grant and Porter determined, before deciding to go below, to make another examination of that point with a view to the proposed attack. For this purpose they went up the Yazoo in a gunboat, from which they made a careful reconnaissance of the works. It convinced them that the attack should not be attempted. On April 2d Grant wrote again to Porter, expressing his final opinion that the army should move to New Carthage, and suggesting that Porter should send down two gunboats, which, with an army corps, he thought would be sufficient to capture Grand Gulf. At this time he was not informed as to the strength of the work.

Porter accordingly set about his preparations for the passage of the Vicksburg batteries. As the field of operations was now in large part to be shifted from above to below the city, and as the lower reaches of the Mississippi and the Red River would require attention, Porter determined to take with him a powerful detachment. He kept at the Yazoo mouth, for subsequent operations above Vicksburg, the new ironclad Choctaw and the Eads gunboats De Kalb and Cincinnati, together with the wooden vessels and tinclads, and all the subsidiary vessels of the fleet; these, with the Black Hawk, comprised the upper squadron. For the passage of the batteries he selected the Benton, the new ships Lafayette and Tuscumbia, and four of the "turtles"—the Louisville, Mound City, Pittsburg, and Carondelet; these were to constitute the lower squadron. Porter also determined to take down the unarmored ram General Price, which was especially fitted to meet the enemy's rams in the Red River. In making the passage she was lashed for protection to the starboard side of the powerful Lafayette. Three trans-

ports, loaded with army stores but without troops, were also taken along as an experiment to see whether they could pass the batteries in condition to be used below. Each gunboat except the Benton had a coal-barge in tow. All the ships were carefully prepared under the admiral's supervision, and, in accordance with his directions, their vulnerable parts were protected with heavy logs and bales of wet hay and cotton. They were to run the gantlet of a fire such as no fleet had hitherto encountered during the war—a fire from eight miles of batteries of the heaviest guns, crowning bluffs two hundred feet in height, enfilading the reaches of the river on both sides of the opposite promontory, and able to deliver their plunging and crushing shots, while safe from serious injury in return, however earnest the efforts of their assailants. It was to be a terrific ordeal, demanding of every officer and man all the coolness and skill, and, still more, the determination of purpose, of which he was capable, and its success depended on the ability of the commander-in-chief to call these qualities into their highest activity.

The night of the 16th of April was fixed for the attempt, and the fleet was arranged in the following order of steaming:

Benton, Lieutenant-Commander James A. Greer; Lafayette, Captain Henry Walke; General Price, Commander S. E. Woodworth (alongside the Lafayette); Louisville, Lieutenant-Commander E. K. Owen; Mound City, Lieutenant-Commander B. Wilson; Pittsburg, Lieutenant W. R. Hoel; Carondelet, Lieutenant J. M. Murphy; Forest Queen, Henry Clay, Silver Wave, transports; Tuscumbia, Lieutenant-Commander James W. Shirk.

The night was dark, and the gunboats got under way at the Yazoo mouth soon after nine o'clock and steamed slowly down toward Vicksburg. The admiral led in the

Benton, which he made his flag-ship for the occasion, and in whose captain, Greer, he justly placed great confidence. No lights were shown anywhere on the ships; the fires were well ignited before starting, to reduce the smoke, and the engines were to exhaust into the wheel, to make as little noise as possible.

For more than an hour the great black masses moved silently down with the current, unobserved by the garrison, until, at eleven o'clock, the Benton came opposite the upper batteries. The enemy were on the alert, their batteries were manned, their guns loaded and ready to fire, although they had no warning of attack. But on that night, as always, they had picket-boats in the stream, and these were the first to discover and give notice of the approach of the squadron. Hastily landing on the opposite point, the pickets set fire to the houses in the village of De Soto. Instantly the alarm was given and the batteries opened on the Benton, which thundered out a reply from the heavy guns in the forward casemate, following them as she reached the turn by her whole broadside. As each vessel in succession swung around the sharp bend of the river she was caught by the eddies in the current and whirled round in a circle directly under the batteries. Only three of the gunboats got through without making this turn. The blazing fires, now lighted on both banks, confused the helmsmen, while the whirling of the gunboats in the eddies, which they were powerless to prevent, just as they passed the jutting point, increased the confusion and destroyed all semblance of the line of battle in which the fleet had been formed. The gunboats were an easy mark, and received far more damage than they inflicted, at the turn of the point and in the long stretches above and below, where they were exposed to a raking fire. The incessant roar

of the heavy guns, the screaming of shells in the air, the crashing of shot through the casemates, the blackness of the night increased by the dense smoke, only rendered more dense by the red glare of fires, which at the bend of the river seemed to encircle the fleet, the helplessness of the vessels as they were caught and whirled around in the eddies, the disorder into which the line was thrown as it followed its winding course—all contributed to strain to the utmost the nerve of the officers as they were passing through the crisis of the battle.

In all this confusion and uproar of the conflict the admiral steadily pursued his way in the Benton at the head of the column. Her course was laid as close to Vicksburg as she could come, and she passed within forty yards of the shore. Early in the action a shot went through her casemate, struck the timbers around the cylinder, and finally lodged in a stateroom. Another shot, entering at another point in the casemate, shattered it from top to bottom, making an opening six feet wide in the side. A third shot, striking farther aft, ripped out another great chasm in the wooden backing. A fourth struck a chain-cable suspended over the side, breaking the chain. A fifth struck near one of the gun-ports, crushed in the armor, and then glanced up and lodged in the hammock nettings. All the shots were, of course, on the port side. Fortunately, none of them disabled the battery, and the Benton, even when she was revolving under the forts, coolly continued to fire as her guns bore upon the enemy. Passing so close to the shore, the people on board could hear the rattle of falling walls after her fire. In the course of a little over half an hour, when she was most actively engaged, she fired eighty-one shots—shells from her 9-inch and rifled 42-pounders and grape from her 32-pounders.



The Lafayette, the second in the line, under Walke, one of the most daring captains in the navy, was still more severely handled. A 100-pounder rifle-shot passed obliquely through her casemate, another through the wheel-house. A third broke through her plating forward. Again and again shots found their way through her armor. Grape-shot passed through her smoke-pipe. Like the Benton, she turned when caught by the eddy, and, being impeded by the coal-barge and the Price lashed alongside, and therefore more helpless in her movements than the others, she was delayed under the batteries, and narrowly escaped running into the bank. She was the best vessel of the squadron, and her loss would have been a serious disaster. The effect of the delays was shown in the large number of shot she received. The Price was also terribly shattered in her upper works, receiving more than a dozen shot and shell, two of the latter exploding in her wardroom, and reducing the officers' quarters to a wreck. At the same time the coal-barge, which was lashed between the two vessels, was sunk by the explosion of a shell. While they thus lay tangled up, and continually pounded by shot from the batteries, the Louisville, which was the next astern, came down upon them, struck the Price in the quarter, and stove in one of her boats. Then, caught like the others in the eddy, she also found herself whirled around, a helpless target for the enemy's fire, and made two full turns before she was released from the play of the counter-currents. At this critical moment the Price cut herself adrift from the Lafayette and was carried down by the current. The coal-barge having sunk, the Lafayette was now free, and she too drifted out of the eddy and resumed her course down the river. In the *mêlée* the coal-barge of the Louisville had got adrift, but her sturdy

captain, Owen, had not lost sight of it, and when the vessels were disentangled he coolly picked it up and again made it fast to his ship, though he was all the time under the enemy's hottest fire.

The Mound City avoided the eddies and the tangle of ships in advance of her by taking a course nearer the city, and passed the Lafayette, the Price, and the Louisville as they lay whirling together. The Pittsburg followed her, and in this way both escaped making the circular turn into which the other ships had been forced. Both of them were repeatedly hit, the Mound City by shot that passed through her casemate, while the Pittsburg was battered in her upper works, her hull being only saved from destruction by the logs that protected her magazine. The Carondelet, following the Pittsburg, suffered less than the others, although she did not escape the eddies. Her captain, Murphy, said: "Opposite to the burning house on the right bank we were compelled to make a turn in the river, and although we were exposed to a heavy concentrated fire for nearly an hour, I attribute to this fortunate pirouette the destruction of the enemy's ranges at us."

At the end of the line came the three transports, followed by the Tuscumbia, which, next to the Lafayette, was the most powerful ship of the fleet. Her captain, Shirk, one of the most gallant and experienced of Porter's officers, had been told by him verbally that he was to be the whipper-in of the fleet, and knowing that the admiral was especially desirous that the transports should get by, Shirk made it his business to remain astern of them and see that they got by. On reaching the point Shirk found that two of the transports had their bows up-stream and were going ahead, which was no doubt due to their involuntary turns. While they were in this

position the Tuscumbia kept her place above them, covering them as far as possible with her fire. In the delay caused by the turn flames burst out on both sides of the Henry Clay, and it became impossible to save her. She burned to the water's edge, her officers and crew escaping on the wreckage to the western bank. In her efforts to keep astern the Tuscumbia ran into the bank, and in backing out collided with the Forest Queen. The collision was seen by the enemy from the batteries and cheers broke out from the shore, apparently, as it seemed to the people on board the Tuscumbia, from right over their heads. The fire was now concentrated upon the two ships, the ironclad and the transport, which remained close together for several minutes before they could be freed. Here the Tuscumbia was struck on her port bow below the water-line, starting the planks and causing the vessel to leak freely. By dint of severe efforts with the pumps the leak was got under control, but in the meantime the Forest Queen had been disabled, a shot having cut her steam-pipe, and she also was leaking badly. Shirk kept behind her for some distance, and then, finding that he could not avoid passing her, he returned, took her in tow and landed her, with fourteen inches of water in her, on the Louisiana shore, from which point she was brought down the next day. The third transport, the Silver Wave, passed through without mishap. Except for the burning of the Henry Clay and the sinking of the Lafayette's coal-barge, no irretrievable disaster attended the passage of the fleet.

General Sherman briefly alludes to the passage in his Memoirs. He says:

Anticipating a scene, I had four yawl-boats hauled across the swamp to the reach of the river below Vicksburg and manned them with soldiers, ready to pick up any of the

disabled wrecks as they floated by. I was out in the stream when the fleet passed Vicksburg, and the scene was truly sublime. As soon as the rebel gunners detected the Benton, which was in the lead, they opened on her and on the others in succession with shot and shell; houses on the Vicksburg side and on the opposite shore were set on fire, which lighted up the whole river; and the roar of cannon, the bursting of shells, and finally the burning of the Henry Clay drifting with the current, made up a picture of the terrible not often seen. Each gunboat returned the fire as she passed the town, while the transports hugged the opposite shore. When the Benton had got abreast of us I pulled off to her, boarded, had a few words with Admiral Porter, and as she was drifting rapidly toward the lower batteries at Warrenton, I left and pulled back toward the shore, meeting the gunboat Tuscumbia towing the transport Forest Queen into the bank out of the range of fire. . . . The Henry Clay was set on fire by bursting shells and burned up; one of my yawls picked up her pilot floating on a piece of wreck.

Shortly after one o'clock in the morning the Benton passed the Warrenton batteries, and an hour later came to anchor off New Carthage. The admiral, whose reports to the department were always moderate in expression, thus described the battle:

Altogether we were very fortunate. The vessels had some narrow escapes, but were saved in most instances by the precautions taken to protect them. They were covered with heavy logs and bales of wet hay, which were found to be an excellent defense.

I can not speak in too high terms of the conduct of all the commanders. They carried out my orders to the best of their ability, having great difficulties to contend with—strong currents and dangerous eddies, glaring fires in every direction that bothered the pilots, smoke almost enveloping the squadron, and a very heavy fire on vessels that

were fair targets for the enemy. I have no cause to be dissatisfied with the result. No one was killed, only one or two badly wounded, and only twelve casualties in all. Most of the wounded are walking about.

The shot the enemy fired were of the heaviest caliber and some of excellent pattern. They came on board, but did no material damage beyond smashing the bulwarks.

The reports of the captains giving the injuries in detail show that while two or three vessels had suffered but little, most of them required pretty extensive repairs. But Porter had a theory about ships of war, which was that they were made to be pounded in battle, and he always made light of damages of this kind. All the same, his first care was to get them into shape again. He immediately set to work and improvised machine-shops, and got together his materials; and by the end of the week he had them all in fighting condition.

In the meantime the problem of the campaign had been modified by the simple lapse of time and the advance of the spring season, which changed completely the conditions on the west bank of the Mississippi. The winter rains were now over; summer was approaching, and the waters of the Mississippi and of all its tributary system of rivers, creeks, swamps, and bayous were rapidly falling. By the time that arrangements had been completed to send the fleet below Vicksburg the country on the opposite shore had emerged from its covering of water, and, instead of a vast swamp through which a difficult passage might be effected by means of flatboats, General Grant now had a continuous line of road extending from Milliken's Bend to New Carthage, over which he immediately proceeded to march his army. Communication was thus readily maintained between the force which the admiral was directing in person below Vicks-

burg and the upper squadron, which he had left in the immediate charge of Breese at the mouth of the Yazoo, and he was able to control the operations from both sides. By the time his repairs were completed McClernand's corps, constituting the advance or right wing of the army, had arrived at New Carthage, half-way between Warrenton and Grand Gulf. McPherson's corps, forming the center, was ready to start from Lake Providence, while the left wing, composed of Sherman's corps, was in part at Young's Point and in part engaged in feigned attacks on Vicksburg from the north.

The plan of campaign which had been developed by Grant and Porter since the 1st of April contemplated bringing the whole army down the west side below the Vicksburg batteries, whence it could be ferried across to the east bank under the protection of the squadron; and having once got upon the Vicksburg plateau, it could advance through a high and level country well adapted for the movements of troops and attack the city from the south and east, the squadrons cooperating from above and below. The most difficult part of the program had been carried out. Porter's fleet had run the batteries intact and one army corps had marched down to New Carthage. Two obstacles remained to be overcome. Transports were necessary to carry the army across, and as yet only two had got through; and finally, the enemy's position at Grand Gulf, which, though far less extensive as a fortification than Vicksburg, was almost impregnable on account of its elevation and its exceedingly heavy earthworks, must be disposed of either by direct attack from the fleet or by engaging its attention while the transports could pass, and subsequently reducing it by the joint efforts of the fleet and army.



To meet the first of these requirements, on the night of the 22d of April the experiment was made of running six transports past the batteries—or, as General Grant always spoke of it, of “running the blockade.” The vessels were carefully prepared, loaded with stores, but without their complement of troops, and protected by cotton-bales. One, the *Tigress*, was sunk, but the other five came through, although considerably damaged in their machinery and upper works. Their injuries were promptly repaired under Porter’s direction by the engineers of the squadron, and though there were not so many of them as could be wished, there were still enough, with the help of the gunboats and barges, to transport the army across the river. It was important that this should be done quickly when once begun, in order that the movement should be, as far as possible, a surprise, and that the Confederate army should not be prepared to oppose the landing. General Grant said in his report :

The transports injured in running the blockade were repaired by order of Admiral Porter, who was supplied with the material for such repairs as they required, and who was and is ever ready to afford all the assistance in his power for the furtherance of the success of our arms. In a very short time five of the transports were in running order and the remainder were in a condition to be used as barges in the moving of troops. Twelve barges loaded with forage and rations were sent in tow of the last six boats that ran the blockade. One-half of them got through in a condition to be used.

It was of the highest importance to deceive the enemy as to the real nature of the movement. This had been provided for by Grant and Porter before the passage of the gunboats. Soon after the return of the Steele’s Bayou expedition, Steele’s division of Sherman’s corps



had been sent to Greenville, half-way up the Yazoo Delta. The passage up the river of the transports, as was intended, had been observed by the enemy, who inferred that Grant purposed to renew his movement of the year before by way of Memphis, or to strike in somewhere in the Yazoo Delta. This last impression was confirmed by a raid made by Steele across the valley. Shortly after, a demonstration was made by General Hurlbut from his position near Grand Junction, and the brilliant and successful cavalry raid of Colonel Grierson during the last two weeks in April, in which he passed through the entire State of Mississippi from north to south, threw General Pemberton, who was deficient in cavalry, into great doubt and uncertainty as to the intentions of the National forces. None of these movements, however, would have been sufficient to draw the enemy away from the threatened point below Vicksburg had it not been for the skilfully planned feint made in the Yazoo River. This operation, which was projected by the general and the admiral in concert, consisted of a pretended joint attack of the army and the fleet on Haynes's Bluff. So effectively was it planned and carried out that, even as late as the 1st of May, notwithstanding the fact that McClelland's corps was on the west bank of the river below Warrenton, and that seven of the gunboats and a like number of transports had passed to the south of Vicksburg, the enemy were still led to believe that the real attack on Vicksburg was to be made from the north.

The vessels detailed for the expedition to Haynes's Bluff were the former flag-ship of the admiral, the *Black Hawk*; the *De Kalb*, under Walker; the new ironclad *Choctaw*, under Ramsay, a brave and efficient young officer; and several wooden vessels—the *Lexington* and

Tyler, and the light-drafts Signal, Romeo, Linden, and Petrel, the whole under Lieutenant-Commander Breese. Three mortar-boats were also sent up in tow of tugs. On the part of the army, General Sherman collected ten transports, which were scantily manned with a few regiments. Early in the afternoon of the 29th of April this imposing force proceeded a few miles up the river to a point near the scene of the ill-fated attack on Chickasaw Bluffs, which General Sherman had made in December. A regiment was here landed and sent out to "the old battleground," as Breese says, "without any important discovery." The next morning it was reembarked, and the force immediately proceeded on its ostentatious course up the river to the neighborhood of Snyder's Mill. Arriving here at ten o'clock in the morning, the Choctaw and De Kalb, with the Black Hawk and Tyler, took position and opened a heavy bombardment for three hours on the batteries and field-works. The object of giving the effect of a real attack was pretty successfully carried out, for Ramsay boldly placed the Choctaw in a position where she was struck forty-six times by the enemy's shot. The troops were landed and marched up in the direction of the batteries, throwing out skirmishers and apparently making ready for an assault. At nightfall they reembarked. On the following day, the 1st of May, the program was repeated with variations, the operations being kept up until night, when the whole force was again embarked and dropped down the river to Young's Point. Here Sherman, in obedience to Grant's orders, immediately started on his march down the west bank to join the other corps at New Carthage. So successful was this operation that General Stevenson, commanding at Vicksburg, supposed it to be the real attack, and regarded the movement below Warrenton as a feint. The troops which

he had despatched to the assistance of Grand Gulf were suddenly recalled, and, as General Sherman suggests, must have marched nearly sixty miles without rest, for the men on their arrival at Vicksburg were completely exhausted. At this very moment Porter with his fleet was attacking Grand Gulf, and making the final preparations to transport the army across the river.

The fortifications at Grand Gulf included two batteries, situated high up on the bluff overhanging the river, and mounting altogether thirteen guns, and were held by a large force under General Bowen. The guns comprised one 100-pounder, two 64-pounders, two 7-inch rifles, three 30-pounders, two 20-pounders, and three 10-pounders, the last eight being Parrott guns. The construction of the earthworks was such that a bombardment from the river could have little effect. On the 22d of April Porter in the *Lafayette* had felt the batteries in a short cannonade and had proposed a joint attack of the army and navy. One division of troops had been embarked at New Carthage for the purpose, but a second reconnaissance made by Grant and Porter on the 24th determined them against this plan. McClermand's corps was then moved down to a still lower point, called Hard Times, on the west bank, just above Grand Gulf, where it remained on board its transports. Here it was followed by McPherson. Notwithstanding the apparent hopelessness of a purely naval attack upon Grand Gulf, General Grant was anxious that it should be tried, and on April 29th, at eight o'clock in the morning, the bombardment was begun. The *Louisville*, *Carondelet*, *Mound City*, and *Pittsburg* attacked the lower battery, while the *Tuscumbia*, *Lafayette*, and *Benton*, the latter with the admiral on board, attacked the upper. The *Lafayette* took her position in the eddy at some little

distance from the fort, while the Benton and Tuscumbia were laid alongside.

The battle lasted between four and five hours, and was one of the hottest for the gunboats that was fought during the war. The vessels advanced in column, and as they reached their stations rounded to, with head upstream, and opened fire upon the batteries to which they had been assigned. Here they remained during the whole bombardment, keeping under way, so that their positions were constantly shifting, but all the time in action and keeping close up within short range, often not more than one hundred yards from the enemy's guns, and the Benton engaging them within fifty yards. The Benton was struck forty-seven times, several of the shot going entirely through the casemate. At one time she was set on fire by a shell exploding in a stateroom, but this was speedily extinguished. Another shell entered the pilot-house, wounding the pilot and shattering the wheel, but the damages were repaired under fire. Her casualties were twenty-six killed and wounded.

During the engagement, while the admiral and Captain Greer were standing with other officers in a group on deck watching the effect of a shot which had just been fired from Ensign Reed's gun, a 7-inch Brooke shell burst on board the vessel, killing or wounding several men, among them the two officers who were standing with Porter and Greer. The admiral was struck by a splinter or some other flying fragment, and just missed being knocked down, being caught by Greer as he was in the act of falling. No injury resulted, nor was the admiral's direction of the battle interrupted. Of the scores of occasions when Porter was under fire during the war, this was the only one where he received anything even approaching an injury. Except in the

action of the Guerrero, he was never wounded during his life.

None of the vessels were lost in the fight, though several received more or less serious injury. The Benton and Tuscumbia, from their position close alongside the upper and heavier fort, were the most seriously damaged, and the latter, still under the command of Shirk, had several severe hits. One of them disabled the port engine, so that she was unable to stem the current, and about half past twelve, when the action was nearly over, she dropped below and came to anchor. She had twenty-eight killed and wounded—a large casualty list for a gunboat, and especially an iron-clad gunboat, in action.

An immense number of projectiles were discharged by the fleet at the fort in this attack. The Benton alone fired three hundred and forty-seven times, using solid shot, shell, canister, and grape. The fire of the other vessels was in like proportion, and the squadron altogether consumed in the neighborhood of twenty-five hundred projectiles. According to Captain Wilson, commanding the Mound City, the skilful and scientific arrangement of the embrasures prevented them from hitting the guns in the batteries. One gun was temporarily disabled, and the batteries, according to General Bowen, who commanded them, “were badly torn to pieces.” Colonel Wade, the chief of artillery at the fort, was killed, but the other casualties numbered less than twenty.

General Grant, explaining why he was unwilling to undertake a joint attack, thus describes the engagement of the fleet:

At 8 A. M. the navy made the attack, and kept it up for more than five hours in the most gallant manner. From a tug out in the stream I witnessed the whole engagement.

Many times it seemed to me the gunboats were within pistol-shot of the enemy's batteries. It soon became evident that the guns of the enemy were too elevated and their fortifications too strong to be taken from the waterside. The whole range of hills on that side were known to be lined with rifle-pits. Besides, the field-artillery could be moved to any position where it could be made useful in case of an attempt at landing.

Early in the engagement the Lafayette had been moved down by the admiral to a position opposite the lower battery for the purpose of obtaining a greater concentration of fire upon that point. Later this battery was practically silenced, and all the gunboats were then ordered to take position above and join the Benton and Tuscumbia in the bombardment of the upper fort, thus concentrating upon it the fire of the entire fleet. Its fire slackened materially, but was never absolutely silenced. About one o'clock all the vessels were withdrawn to their anchorage above Grand Gulf, and Porter went on board General Grant's tug to confer with him. At three o'clock, observing that the enemy were endeavoring to repair their batteries, he sent down the Lafayette, which engaged the upper fort and put a stop to the work. She continued firing at five-minute intervals from her 100-pounder rifles until eight o'clock in the evening.

At the conference with General Grant the admiral proposed to take down the troops from Hard Times in transports, and run the Grand Gulf batteries under cover of the fleet, as their fire had so sensibly diminished toward the close of the attack. Grant, however, preferred to march the army down, in view of the important work which it had before it, and let the transports go down empty, which of course involved less risk. In the afternoon and evening McClernand accordingly disembarked



his men at Hard Times and marched his corps across the neck of land to De Shroon's plantation, five miles below Grand Gulf. At six o'clock in the evening Porter again got under way with his entire fleet except the Tuscomb, which had remained below, and ran past the batteries at Grand Gulf. Under cover of a heavy fire from the gunboats the empty transports also ran the batteries, receiving only a few shots which inflicted little damage. By midnight all the vessels were anchored below Grand Gulf, and Porter was absorbed during the remainder of the night in making preparations for the crossing of the army. For this purpose not only the transports were to be used, but the gunboats as well.

At daybreak on April 30th the Thirteenth Corps were embarked on board the combined fleet, and after steaming down the river nine miles were landed at Bruinsburg on the east bank, which had been selected for the purpose on account of the good roads leading to Port Gibson in the interior. So rapidly was the movement accomplished with the cooperation of the squadron that McClelland was able with his advance-guard to reach the bluffs two miles back of Bruinsburg an hour before sundown. In the evening he was joined by Logan's division of the Seventeenth Corps under McPherson, making in all twenty thousand men, with which General Grant could begin his advance the next day. The enemy were completely surprised, and there was no one to oppose the landing; nor, indeed, any force in the neighborhood except the garrison at Grand Gulf, and that was miles above. On the following day was fought the battle of Port Gibson, in which General Bowen was defeated and compelled to retreat, and which formed the beginning of that wonderful campaign by which Grant effected a lodgment on the plateau in the rear of Vicksburg.



As the remainder of McPherson's corps came down the west bank, followed by that of Sherman, which was the last to leave the neighborhood of the Yazoo, they were promptly ferried across the Mississippi at Bruinsburg and immediately proceeded to join the rest of Grant's command. Two days later, on May 3d, Porter moved up to Grand Gulf with the Benton and four other gunboats for the purpose of renewing the attack, but found the place evacuated. Porter landed and took possession. An hour later he left Grand Gulf in charge of Lieutenant-Commander Owen of the Louisville, and, with that extraordinary promptness of decision and movement that were characteristic of him, hastened with the Benton and four other gunboats straight down to the Red River, two hundred miles below. He had seen at a glance that there was no immediate work for the squadron near Vicksburg, and that he would be able to reply to Farragut's repeated requests for cooperation at that point, which until this moment had been impossible. At the Red River he remained ten days, relieving Farragut of his blockading duties, and entering with zest into the campaign then in progress under General Banks, the events of which properly fall within the next chapter. At the end of that time Porter left Captain Walke in the Lafayette to hold the Red River, with the Pittsburg and some of the smaller gunboats, and he himself returned with the Benton and the Price to Grand Gulf, where his presence was again urgently needed.\*

The two days after Porter's return to Grand Gulf were busily occupied with the necessary disposition of his ships and attending to the wants of the squadron below Vicksburg. On the morning of May 15th he steamed up to Warrenton and made an examination of its condition to satisfy himself of the effect of the bombard-

ment of its batteries by the Mound City. Finding that this work had been satisfactorily done, the admiral proceeded up the west bank by land to the Yazoo, where the upper squadron, of which Breese had been temporarily in charge, required his attention.

Porter's force was now more than ever divided, and called for increased activity and care in providing for the details of operations at all points. Two of his iron clads were up the Red River, three hundred miles away. The *De Kalb* and *Choctaw* were stationed in the Yazoo. The *Cincinnati*, under Bache, was at the Yazoo mouth. The *Benton*, *Louisville*, *Mound City*, *Carondelet*, and *Tuscumbia* were at various points in the Mississippi below Vicksburg, where they could operate to the best advantage, one being at Grand Gulf, one at New Carthage, and three at Warrenton. Communication was kept up partly by land and partly by water, the roads over which the army had marched on the west bank being now open and secure. Besides the disposition of the force in the Yazoo, the admiral found awaiting him innumerable questions connected with the detached operations of the vessels on the upper Mississippi, and in the long stretches of the Cumberland, the Tennessee, the Arkansas, and the Ohio.

During the three weeks that elapsed after the crossing of the army at Bruinsburg General Grant was conducting in person his brilliant and rapid campaign to the south and east of Vicksburg, in which the armies of Johnston and Pemberton were beaten in detail, the city of Jackson was captured, and the National forces effected a lodgment in the very outworks of Vicksburg itself. The closing movement of the campaign was to surround Vicksburg on the land side, the lines of the besiegers forming an immense horseshoe, whose points were to

touch the river both at the north and at the south. The campaign was conducted without a base of operations, and almost without a wagon-train, the army supporting itself off of the enemy's country. It was imperative that as soon as it reached the neighborhood of the river to the north of Vicksburg the fleet should be prepared to open communications and make sure of its base of supplies on the Yazoo. It was with a view to this contingency and to cooperate with the army on its arrival that Porter had left his station below and had returned to the upper squadron.

On the 18th of May, at noon, the admiral, then on board his flag-ship, the Black Hawk, lying in the Yazoo, where he had been watching eagerly for signs of the approach of the troops, first heard heavy firing in the rear of Vicksburg, which told him that Grant's forces were coming up from the other side. After the cannonading had been kept up for some time, Porter descried through his glasses a battery of field-artillery moving through an opening in the bluffs above and taking position. This was the advance of Sherman's corps, now forming the right wing of Grant's army. It had struck from the land side the very point on the long line of works northeast of Vicksburg, at the Chickasaw Bluffs, which Sherman had attempted in the previous December to assault from the water side with such disastrous results. Porter immediately despatched Breese with the De Kalb and Choctaw and four of the light-drafts up the Yazoo to open communication with the army. In the course of three hours this was effected, and Porter received letters from Grant, Sherman, and Steele, informing him of the situation, and asking that provisions be sent up; which was immediately done.

In the meantime the De Kalb, under Walker, was

pushed up toward Haynes's Bluff. On the day before, anticipating the advance of Grant's army, General Pemberton, now commanding in person at Vicksburg, had ordered General Hébert, commanding the post of Snyder's Mill, which comprised the group of fortifications at Haynes's Bluff and Drumgould's Bluff, to evacuate the forts, bringing off the lighter guns and ammunition, and spiking the heavy guns. The time was so short that Hébert only got off half of the ammunition, and two companies were left at the post to make a show of occupation. On the approach of the *De Kalb* the detachment hastily made its escape, leaving everything behind it which Hébert had not carried off. At the same time a body of cavalry under Colonel Swan, from Sherman's command, arrived to take possession. As soon as the situation of affairs was reported, Admiral Porter proceeded up with additional vessels to Snyder's and destroyed the works.

At the same time, the raft in front of Haynes's Bluff having given way, the admiral despatched Walker in all haste to Yazoo City with the *De Kalb*, *Choctaw*, *Forest Rose*, *Linden*, and *Petrel*. On his way up Walker repulsed a force of artillery and sharpshooters, which attacked him at Liverpool, where they were concealed in the woods. On the 21st, at one o'clock, he arrived at Yazoo City and took possession. The Confederates on his approach had set fire to the place, and Walker completed the work of destruction. The navy-yard with its mills, machine-shops, foundries, and lumber-yards, which had been so important a factor in the defense of the Yazoo Delta, were destroyed, together with three vessels in course of construction, all well advanced and of a formidable character. The work was thoroughly done, and Yazoo City as a naval station ceased to exist.

Porter's activities, however, were not confined to the Yazoo. Already on the night of the 18th, as soon as he had learned of the arrival of the army, he promptly moved up the lower squadron to attack the hill batteries on the southernmost line of the Vicksburg defenses. The bombardment was kept up for two or three hours until midnight, when the ironclads moved up still farther abreast of the city and opened on it for an hour, continuing their fire at intervals during the night to annoy the garrison. The fleet, like the army, was thus pressing Vicksburg both from the south and the north.

During the next three days General Grant was occupied in completing his investment. The lines were more closely drawn, and the outposts of the two armies were now facing each other at a distance of a few hundred yards. During these three days Porter kept up a steady fire upon the river defenses, principally upon the lower hill batteries. On the 19th he placed six mortar-boats in position above the city, with orders to fire night and day, as rapidly as they could. On the same day, during the afternoon and again at night, the Benton, Tuscumbia, and Carondelet were engaged in shelling the batteries. A similar program was carried out on the 20th and 21st, the three vessels taking turns, but one or the other, and sometimes two, being engaged during the whole day and night.

Before undertaking a regular siege Grant determined to try the effect of a general assault, for which he needed the cooperation of the fleet. The assault was fixed for ten o'clock on the morning of the 22d. During the night before Porter kept up a rapid fire from the mortars, in which the gunboats took part at intervals. At seven o'clock in the morning the Mound City moved up to the attack. At eight o'clock Porter joined her with the Ben-

ton, Tuscumbia, and Carondelet. All the vessels directed their fire steadily on the hill batteries, and finally silenced them. The admiral then pushed on the Benton, Mound City, and Carondelet to the water-batteries, leaving the Tuscumbia, which was now much battered up, to occupy the attention of the hill batteries while the other vessels engaged those above. They moved up slowly, owing to the strong current, the Mound City leading. The water-batteries opened furiously upon them, supported by a fort on the bluff directly opposite the vessels. The latter advanced to within four hundred and fifty yards and returned the fire for two hours without cessation, the enemy's fire being very accurate and persistent. As the lower hill batteries had now been silenced, Porter ordered up the Tuscumbia to within eight hundred yards; but her turret could not withstand the enemy's shot and was soon made untenable, and she was directed to drop down out of action.

The fire of the enemy on this day was the hottest to which the gunboats had yet been exposed. They were repeatedly struck, the Benton and the Mound City more than a dozen times, but as they were fighting bow on the shot did comparatively little damage; and they were rather more successful in disturbing the aim of the gunners in the water-batteries, which were nearly on a level with them, than they had been in attacking the forts on the hills. On the other hand, the crews of the gunboats were now becoming used to occupying their places directly under the Vicksburg batteries, and they maintained the utmost steadiness under the enemy's galling fire.

After continuing the action an hour longer than the time named by General Grant, and the supply of ammunition being nearly exhausted, Porter dropped down



with the vessels to renew the supply at his depot below. Finding that the enemy had reoccupied one of the lower hill batteries in his absence, where they were endeavoring to remove their guns, and had meantime placed a field-piece in position to fire on McArthur's division, Porter sent the Mound City and Carondelet to drive them off, which was accomplished in a few minutes. McArthur wrote the next day to Porter: "I witnessed with intense satisfaction the firing on that day, being the finest I have yet seen." During this long action the Benton alone fired two hundred and eighty-three shots and was struck thirteen times, four times at the water-line. The Mound City also was severely hammered. The assault of the army, however, was unsuccessful, and General Grant decided to complete his investment and settled down to regular siege operations.

By this time General Sherman, commanding the right wing of the army, had pushed his advance so far that his right rested on the Mississippi, on the upper hill slopes below the Yazoo mouth. He wrote an urgent letter to Porter asking him to send a gunboat down from above to silence the water-battery immediately in his front, and to enfilade the left flank of the enemy's works, by which he hoped to secure a material improvement in his position. It was an undertaking full of risk, as the batteries to be attacked contained some of the heaviest guns in Vicksburg, and a vessel, if rendered unmanageable by a disabling shot, would be carried down by the current, and be forced to run the gantlet of the whole line of works. But Sherman said in his letter: "I think nearly all the guns of their upper batteries are moved inside of Vicksburg and are now on the land front." General Grant seconded Sherman's request; and the admiral, although against his judgment, as he had strong doubts



about the removal of the guns, agreed to send down a vessel to make the trial.

At seven o'clock on the morning of the 27th the Cincinnati, under the command of Bache, which had been selected for the purpose, left her anchorage and steamed slowly down until abreast of the station of the mortar-boats, when she rounded to. Porter had packed her with logs and hay, and taken every other precaution that he could think of. He had also ordered the Price, Benton, Mound City, and Carondelet to move up at the same time and engage the lower batteries to give the effect of a concerted attack from both sides. At half past eight, everything being in readiness and the vessels below having commenced their attack, Bache left the station of the mortar-vessels under a full head of steam and moved down to the position assigned him. The report that the enemy had removed their heavy guns from the upper forts proved to be unfounded, and all of them immediately opened a concentrated fire upon the devoted vessel. They aimed with great accuracy, hitting her nearly every time. The plunging shots from the 8-inch rifles and 10-inch smoothbores went entirely through her protection—hay, wood, and iron. The only shot that did not penetrate struck her on the bow casemate, which was well greased. Two shots entered the shell-room, one passing out through the side, the other through the recess of the wheel, below the water-line. A heavy rifle-shot penetrated the pilot-house and shot away the star-board tiller. Several plunging shot went through her deck, and six of her guns were struck and disabled. Even the flagstaff was shot away, and the flag was nailed to the stump of the forestaff. Finally, a shot entered the magazine and the ship began to fill rapidly. Finding that she would soon sink, Bache ran her up-stream and

as near the east bank as her damaged steering-gear would permit.

Porter, feeling some misgivings about the Cincinnati, had gone down later in a tug to direct her movements if necessary. As he approached the mortar-vessels he discovered her coming up-stream under a heavy fire, but, seeing none of the shots strike her, and as she presently was hidden from view by the intervening point, he supposed she had taken a short cut to the Yazoo through Old River, and pursued his course to the mortar-boats. The Cincinnati kept on until she reached the bank. As the helmsman had been killed, Bache had himself taken the helm and steered her out of action. He could not fire a gun, for the magazine was drowned, and nearly all the guns were disabled. Approaching the bank, he got out a plank and put the wounded ashore. He also got out a hawser to make fast to a tree to hold her in place until she sank, but the man ashore at the hawser let it go while the enemy were still firing, and the boat began drifting out. Bache sang out to the men to jump and swim ashore; and they were hardly off when the vessel sank in three fathoms of water, with her colors still flying on the stump. Her loss was fifteen drowned and twenty-five killed and wounded.

Although this mischance had resulted in the loss of one of his ironclads, Porter could not but feel, when he learned the circumstances, that he had just cause for satisfaction in the splendid gallantry of her young captain, whose ship had been sacrificed from a mistaken assumption as to the enemy's force. There were few actions on the Western rivers that showed more coolness and heroism than that in which the Cincinnati was lost. Bache, who was a nephew of the admiral by marriage, obtained the warmest commendation from his commander-

in-chief, and the Secretary of the Navy, as soon as he received the reports, took occasion to write him a glowing letter in appreciation of his conduct.

Shortly before this event the admiral had again sent Walker in the *De Kalb* with four of the light-drafts to make a raid through the Yazoo Delta. The object was to break up transportation on the Yazoo and its tributaries, in which during the past winter and spring a regular service of steam-transports, store-ships, and cotton-clad gunboats had been maintained with great advantage to the enemy. Porter had determined to destroy everything afloat in the Delta. The expedition left the Yazoo mouth on the 24th of May, and was gone a week. It proceeded up the Yazoo as far as Fort Pemberton, and up the Sunflower and its branches and adjoining bayous for two hundred miles. Boat expeditions were sent out to the junction of Rolling Fork and Deer Creek, the scene of Porter's obstinate fight two months before, and to other outlying points, and the waters of the Delta were thoroughly cleared of vessels. Nine steamers were destroyed either by the expedition or by the enemy upon its approach.

The army was now engaged in regular siege operations, the three corps of Sherman, McPherson, and McClernand pressing Vicksburg closely on the land side, and the fleet completing the investment on the water. The stubborn endurance of the defense was equaled by the tenacity and energy of the assailants. The object of the investing force, ashore and afloat, was to press the enemy as closely as possible on both sides, to harass and worry them out by constant attack, never for a moment relaxing their efforts, and so to demoralize the garrison. This pressure was all the more necessary, since large Confederate forces were ready and waiting to attempt the

raising of the siege, both from the east, where Johnston was in command, and from the west, where the trans-Mississippi armies had little to occupy them. But Johnston never moved; and the garrisons at outlying posts on the west bank, with the all-important support of the gunboats on the river, were able to repulse the attacks from that quarter. Repeated attempts were made from the west to force a passage to the river, at Milliken's Bend, at Goodrich's Landing, and at Helena. In each case the small army detachment was threatened with destruction, and in each case it was saved by the promptness of the admiral in despatching a force to succor the troops. The action at Milliken's Bend, where Ramsay commanded the Choctaw, and that at Helena, where Pritchett commanded the Tyler, were among the most gallant and well conducted of the many engagements of the navy during the siege. At Goodrich's Landing the marine brigade, under General Ellet, which was attached to the fleet, performed a similar service; and when a large body of Confederates advanced upon Richmond, in Louisiana, Ellet's force was again called into service, and in conjunction with General Mower's brigade defeated the enemy and caused their retreat.

During this whole period the occupations of the admiral in the supervision of the fleet were incessant. The division of the squadron into two detachments, one above and the other below the batteries, proved to be a most efficient disposition of the force. At the same time it doubled the labor of directing the operations, compelling the admiral to be constantly passing from one squadron to the other. Each had its depot, its allotted stations in action, and its anchorage when not actually engaged, and to all of these vessels it became in time as accustomed and habitual a thing to spend the day lying under

the Vicksburg batteries and engaging them as to spend it at anchor, above or below. Upon certain occasions, as on the 20th of June, when General Grant planned a general bombardment from the army's lines, the entire fleet joined in the attack, and at other times the vessels were engaged one or more at a time, as the occasion seemed to require. But the most important result accomplished by the division of the squadron was the closing up of the Vicksburg blockade. The investment was as complete on the river as on the land side—a point absolutely necessary to the success of the siege, which could not have been secured without the presence of the naval forces both above and below. From every use to which the river might have been put by the besieged garrison, whether for communication, for reenforcement, or for the introduction of supplies, they were cut off by the ceaseless vigilance of Porter and his two squadrons. Finally, when the garrison, as a last desperate chance, planned to escape by the construction of a vast flotilla of barges, they were only deterred by the floating sentinels always on the watch on both sides of the town.

As might be expected from his previous experience, Porter gave much care and attention to the handling of the mortar-boats. Being compelled to operate from above, their employment in the swift current was attended with great risk, which was increased by the absence of all protection and by the fact that they could not avail themselves of a vessel's best defense against the enemy's guns, a well-directed fire from her own; for the batteries from whose fire they chiefly suffered were not the object of their attack. Porter therefore stationed them cautiously, at first at a considerable distance above the city, and little by little advanced their position, as he found from day to day that it could safely be done. His prudence

in this matter caused some expressions of impatience from the landsmen, who failed to understand the peculiar requirements of the situation. This gave the admiral little concern, and he pursued his own course, keeping up an incessant bombardment night and day, with constantly increasing effect, as the army gladly testified. The excessive strain of the service, so often referred to by Porter before the New Orleans forts, used up every man connected with it, the commanding officer, Gunner Eugene Mack, succumbing after thirty days of uninterrupted service, when he was compelled to give up his place to another. Batteries were silenced, buildings were shattered, and the inhabitants shortly betook themselves to living in caves and bomb-proofs, which they dug out in the hillsides. Before the siege ended Porter had secured such certainty of range and precision that he was accurately dropping a continuous rain of shells in the enemy's works, on the land side beyond the city, where the Union outposts were facing them; and we find Grant sending this significant despatch:

ADMIRAL PORTER: Brigadier-General Hovey informs me that the firing from the mortar-boats this morning has been exceedingly well directed on my front. One shell fell into the large fort, and several along the lines of the rifle-pits. Please have them continue firing in the same direction and elevation.

U. S. GRANT.

It would be hard to find an example of more efficient mortar-firing than this.

The army, being sensibly deficient in siege-guns, applied to the admiral to mount some of the naval guns in battery in their lines. Porter furnished not only the guns, but the officers and men to fight them. In this way there were erected three batteries in front of the



respective corps, that in Sherman's lines being commanded first by Selfridge and afterward by Walker, and in McPherson's by Acting-Master Dahlgren; while that in front of Herron's division of McClelland's corps, which was known as Fort Benton, was commanded by Ensign Reed of that vessel. The services rendered by all these batteries were generously acknowledged by the corps and division commanders. Selfridge's guns fired over a thousand shells into the enemy's works, completely silencing the batteries opposed to him, and the ability with which they were worked brought out the warmest praises from Sherman. According to General Herron, the naval battery was the most effective that he had, and the general wrote to Porter that Reed, the officer in charge, had well sustained the reputation of the squadron. When the general bombardment was ordered on the 20th of June Porter placed the three heavy guns of the sunken Cincinnati in battery on floats at the point opposite the Vicksburg, in a position to command the town and the water-batteries. This improvised fort was commanded by Ramsay of the Choctaw. Every gun the enemy could bring to bear upon the floats was incessantly fired at them, but without interrupting their fire for a moment. The battery completely enfiladed the heavy works and rifle-pits in front of General Sherman and made them untenable.

Toward the close of June it became apparent that the garrison, pressed on all sides, had little power of resistance left, and that the end was near at hand. Negotiations were accordingly opened with Pemberton looking to a capitulation, and on the 4th of July Vicksburg surrendered. The surrender of Port Hudson followed immediately upon the announcement of the fall of Vicksburg, and the Mississippi was now finally opened from its source to its mouth.



Not the least remarkable feature of this protracted campaign was the perfect understanding and cooperation between the commanding officers ashore and afloat, and at its close each expressed in the most generous terms his cordial appreciation of the other. In his final report to the department, referring to the services of his officers and reciting the results of the campaign, Porter, with that remarkable self-effacement that distinguishes his official correspondence, makes no suggestion of personal credit for the success of the campaign. He says:

I have endeavored to do justice to all who were immediately engaged in the struggle for the mastery of the Mississippi. To the army do we owe immediate thanks for the capture of Vicksburg, but the army was much facilitated by the navy, which was ready at all times to cooperate. This has been no small undertaking. The late investment and capture of Vicksburg will be characterized as one of the greatest military achievements ever known. The conception of the idea originated solely with General Grant, who adopted a course in which great labor was performed, great battles were fought, and great risks were run. A single mistake would have involved us in difficulty, but so well were all the plans matured, so well were all the movements timed, and so rapid were the evolutions performed that not a mistake has occurred from the passage of the fleet by Vicksburg, and the passage of the army across the river, up to the present time. So confident was I of the ability of General Grant to carry out his plans when he explained them to me that I never hesitated to change my position from above to below Vicksburg. The work was hard, the fighting severe, but the blows struck were constant.

On the other hand, General Grant bears this voluntary testimony to the work of the navy:

The navy under Porter was all it could be during the entire campaign. Without its assistance the campaign could

not have been successfully made with twice the number of men engaged. It could not have been made at all in the way it was, with any number of men, without such assistance. The most perfect harmony reigned between the two arms of the service. There never was a request made, that I am aware of, either of the flag-officer or any of his subordinates, that was not promptly complied with.

It is worthy of note that on the evening of the surrender of Vicksburg General Sherman, who was now absent on detached service in the interior, watching the movements of Johnston's army, should have occupied himself by choice—for there was no occasion to do it—with writing a letter of congratulation to the admiral. The letter, with all its exuberance and its occasional confusion of metaphors, is worth quoting, for it shows better than anything else the warm regard in which the admiral was held by that generous and gallant soldier. General Sherman wrote:

HEADQUARTERS EXPEDITIONARY ARMY,  
BLACK RIVER, *July 4, 1863.*

DEAR ADMIRAL: No event in my life could have given me more personal pride or pleasure than to have met you to-day on the wharf at Vicksburg—a Fourth of July so eloquent in events as to need no words or stimulants to elevate its importance.

I can appreciate the intense satisfaction you must feel at lying before the very monster which has defied us with such deep and malignant hate and seeing your once disunited fleet again a unit; and, better still, the chain that made an enclosed sea of a link in the great river broken forever. In so magnificent a result I stop not to count who did it. It is done, and the day of our nation's birth is consecrated and baptized anew in a victory won by the united army and navy of our country. God grant that the harmony and mutual respect that exists between our respective

commanders, and shared by all the true men of the joint service, may continue forever, and serve to elevate our national character, threatened with shipwreck. Thus I muse, as I sit in my solitary camp out in the wood, far from the point for which we have jointly striven so long and so well, and, though personal curiosity would tempt me to go and see the frowning batteries and sunken pits that have defied us so long, and sent to their silent graves so many of our early comrades in the enterprise, I feel that other tasks lie before me, and time must not be lost. Without casting anchor, and despite the heat and the dust and the drought, I must again into the bowels of the land, to make this conquest of Vicksburg fulfil all the conditions it should in the progress of this war. Whether success attend my efforts or not, I know that Admiral Porter will ever accord to me the exhibition of a pure and unselfish zeal in the service of our country.

It does seem to me that Port Hudson, without facilities for supplies or interior communication, must soon follow the fate of Vicksburg and leave the river free, and to you the task of preventing any more Vicksburgs or Port Hudsons on the bank of the great inland sea.

Though farther apart, the navy and army will still act in concert, and I assure you I shall never reach the banks of the river or see a gunboat but I will think of Admiral Porter, Captain Breese, and the many elegant and accomplished gentlemen it has been my good fortune to meet on armed or unarmed decks of the Mississippi squadron. Congratulating you and the officers and men of your command at the great result in which you have borne so conspicuous a part, I remain, as ever, your friend and servant,

W. T. SHERMAN,

*Major-General.*

*Admiral D. D. PORTER, Commanding Fleet.*

Nor did the Government fail to appreciate the services of Porter. For the second time in his career he

received by name the thanks of Congress, given him, as the joint resolution stated, "for the eminent skill, endurance, and gallantry exhibited by him and his squadron in cooperation with the army in opening the Mississippi River." At the same time, although only a commander in actual rank, he was promoted over all the commanders, captains, and commodores above him to the grade of rear-admiral, at the head of which was Farragut, and in which Porter now found himself side by side with the victorious squadron commanders of the war.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE MISSISSIPPI SQUADRON IN 1863

IT might be inferred from the preceding narrative that Porter, from his first arrival at the Yazoo in December, 1862, until the 4th of July, 1863, when Pemberton surrendered, had been exclusively occupied with the campaign against Vicksburg. This was very far from the fact, although the local campaign was quite enough of itself to engross his attention. In order to preserve the continuity of the Vicksburg narrative, it has seemed best to refer separately to the arduous duties of the direction and administration of the squadron, aside from the Vicksburg campaign. During all this time the admiral had to conduct the operations of his force over three thousand miles of inland navigation. Here his first and most important duty was to preserve the lines of communication. Upon this the army was totally dependent, for it had no base except that afforded by the control of the river. It was necessary to see that all the rivers were efficiently patrolled, that transports and supply vessels were protected, that rapid concentration was effected, as occasion constantly required, at threatened points, and that the needs of the army were supplied wherever they arose.

In addition, the admiral had a multitude of cares and responsibilities connected with the internal administration of the fleet, the discipline of its officers and men, and

the development of its material resources—all, in short, that made for its efficiency—in crews, ships, and armament. There were also many difficult questions in respect to the treatment of the local population, combatant or non-combatant, as well as that large element in it that was combatant and non-combatant by turns, as occasion suited; and in connection with this, the regulation and supervision of the reopening trade along the rivers, which their occupation by the fleet tended to stimulate. All these questions were far more perplexing than those ordinarily arising in war, where the line is sharply drawn between the citizens of opposing belligerents; for although the frontier of the Confederacy was perfectly defined, the opposing States on both sides of the line contained many inhabitants whose sympathies were with the Government across the border. It is safe to say that no naval officer ever before, while personally conducting the operations of war, was charged with such multifarious and complicated duties.

Among the innumerable details of squadron service none were more exacting than those connected with the development of Porter's inadequate force of vessels. During his whole command he was purchasing, building, altering, repairing, fitting out, manning, and arming gunboats from every possible source. In the winter and spring of 1863 every month saw the addition of new vessels to the squadron. In the details of this work the assistance of Pennock at Cairo was invaluable, but the ultimate burden of responsibility for the whole rested on the commander-in-chief; and Porter was not a man to shirk any burdens where the efficiency of his force was concerned. These were enormously increased by the absence of trained officers. In the whole squadron there were not more than forty or fifty officers of the line be-

longing to the regular navy—not enough to provide captains for half the vessels. The others were volunteer officers, of whom few had ever handled or even seen a ship's gun before the war. The mere duty of assigning them to the best advantage was no slight labor, and Porter in the early days, as he cheerfully admitted to the department, did not always at first get hold of the best men. Thus he writes, when asking for the revocation of the appointment of some unworthy officer, which had been made on his own recommendation perhaps a few weeks before, "I can not sometimes avoid mistakes in appointments"; and again in February, 1863, he begins a similar request with the phrase, so characteristic in its frankness and simplicity, "Among the mistakes I have made in the appointments here is Acting-Master ——," evidently feeling that apologies were unnecessary.

In the midst of his exacting cares at and around Vicksburg and to the north Porter had not forgotten the importance of blockading the Red River; in fact, no subject was more present to his mind. It was really no part of his duty to conduct operations in the Red River district, for it had been specifically assigned to Farragut by the department's order of October 2, 1862. Porter, therefore, had no actual responsibility in connection with it. Nevertheless, the months rolled by, and no movement was made from the south, chiefly because of the enemy's powerful batteries at Port Hudson, over two hundred miles below Vicksburg, which barred the passage of Farragut's fleet. Accordingly, Porter determined, in view of the importance of stopping the Red River traffic, to make some effort to reestablish the control of the river from that point up to Vicksburg. Again it was impossible for him to take personal charge of the movement, for the blockade of the Red River would



necessarily be a detached operation conducted by isolated vessels, and his place was with the main body of his fleet.

For the purpose of breaking up the transportation of Confederate supplies below Vicksburg Porter selected the ram *Queen of the West* as the most available vessel in his force, and as having above all the others the quality most needed for the work, namely, speed. The object was not to take the offensive in naval operations against the enemy's forces either ashore or afloat, but to put a stop to the transit of supplies by the capture and destruction of the vessels employed in it and their cargoes. The Confederates had one very efficient ram-gunboat in the Red River, the *Webb*, but she had not the speed of the *Queen*, and the object of the latter was to get out of her way. The *Queen* was commanded by Colonel Ellet, who, although not altogether well balanced and certainly inexperienced, was a man of great boldness and dash. The ship selected for the service must pass the batteries at Vicksburg, and, though she might run some risk of injury below, even to the extent of becoming a total loss, her sudden descent and the destruction of property that she might effect in a single foray would be well worth the risk. Incidentally, the admiral also desired, if possible, to disable a Confederate gunboat, the *Vicksburg*, then lying at anchor under the guns of the city.

On the night of the 2d of February, about the date when the army engineers were cutting through the levee at Yazoo Pass, the *Queen of the West* ran the Vicksburg batteries. She was fitted out for the passage with a breastwork of cotton bales. Ellet was delayed in starting, and did not get off till after daybreak. He was therefore obliged to run the batteries in full view. This he

did in the most gallant manner. Steaming along under a tremendous fire, he rammed the Vicksburg, though with little effect, as the current, catching his stern, deadened the force of the blow. Porter had directed him at the same time to fire incendiary projectiles from his bow-gun, by means of which he set the vessel on fire. His own ship also was soon in flames, the cotton breastworks having been ignited by the enemy's shells, and he only saved her by cutting loose the burning bales and throwing them overboard. The Queen was struck twelve times and had her cabin knocked to pieces; but no material injury was done to the boat or her crew. The Vicksburg was permanently disabled.

The Queen immediately proceeded down the river, where her presence was a complete surprise. As yet Grand Gulf had not been fortified, and there were no batteries between Warrenton and Port Hudson. The Queen steamed rapidly down to the Red River and ascended it for fifteen miles. Three steamers were captured, one of them with a number of Confederate officers, the others with cargoes of provisions and army supplies. All of them were burned, as the Queen's coal supply was short and prizes would have delayed her return. A considerable quantity of provisions was also destroyed on shore. This was the work of a few hours. Within three days after running the batteries she was back again at the point just below Vicksburg, and in communication with the army outposts on the west bank. On the night of the 7th Porter set adrift a loaded coal-barge, which ran the batteries unobserved and drifted down ten miles to the point where the Queen was waiting to receive it.

The admiral now ordered Ellet to return down the river with the coal-barge in tow and take in company the De Soto, a small ferry-boat which he had captured

near Warrenton. In one of his characteristic orders Porter gave Ellet minute instructions as to what he was to do. The order said: "The great object is to destroy all you can of the enemy's stores and provisions and get your vessel back safe." Ellet was particularly enjoined not to "lose sight of the De Soto unless in chase and under circumstances where it would be perfectly safe. When your coal is all out of the barge you can take the De Soto alongside. You can help each other along." The admiral added with his usual directness: "There is one vessel, the Webb, that you must look out for. If you get the first crack at her you will sink her, and if she gets the first crack at you she will sink you. Above all," the orders said, "pass all batteries at night."

The second raid of the Queen was a succession of catastrophes. She entered the Red River and passed down the Atchafalaya, making important captures of stores and provisions at various points on the banks. Returning to the Red River, she captured a provision steamer called the New Era, which she left in charge of a prize crew. She also left the De Soto below, and ascended the river. On the night of the 14th of February, in attempting to pass the guns of Fort Taylor at Gordon's Landing, she ran ashore, and in that position became a target for the enemy's fire, which presently cut the steam-pipe. Having separated himself from the De Soto, Ellet could not remove his wounded, and in consequence neglected to set fire to the Queen, and the officers and crew only succeeded in making their escape on the cotton bales which formed the steamer's breastwork, and which were thrown overboard and drifted down with their living freight to the De Soto. The De Soto started down, but presently lost her rudder by running into the bank

in a fog, and she was allowed to drift fifteen miles farther down until she reached the New Era, the prize of the day before. The men were then transferred to the New Era, and the De Soto and the coal-barge were burned, the prize making her way back to Vicksburg as quickly as she could. Well might Porter say in his report to the department: "The best calculations are liable to be upset, and mine have been disarranged by the capture of the Queen of the West up Red River."

In the meantime, before the news of the capture had arrived, and in fact before it took place, Porter had sent down another vessel to reenforce the Queen, and to afford the offensive and defensive power which the Queen lacked, and thereby serve the purpose of protecting her. This vessel was the Indianola. Like the Chillicothe, she was a new casemate ironclad built for naval use; but she was a larger ship, and her armament included two 11-inch guns in her casemate forward, and two 9-inch guns aft, all of them with a lateral train and ports, and she was also strengthened for ramming. She was therefore one of the most powerful vessels in Porter's force. She was to take two coal-barges alongside, and Porter stated to her commander, Brown, in written instructions: "The object in sending you is to protect the ram Queen of the West and the De Soto against the Webb, the enemy's ram. She will not attack you both." Commander Brown was also cautioned to use extreme prudence, and Porter said: "When you have not means of certain success, undertake nothing. A failure is equal to a defeat." With this combined force of the Indianola, the Queen, and the De Soto amply supplied with coal, Porter felt certain that the control of the waters below Vicksburg, and in particular of the Red River, could be assured.

On the night of the 13th the *Indianola* ran the batteries without being struck by a single shot, and carried through successfully her two coal-barges. Descending the river on the 16th, she met the *Era* coming up with Ellet and the crew of the *Queen*. She proceeded down as far as the Red River, taking the *Era* with her. Here she met the *Webb*, which was coming up in pursuit of the *Era*, but which immediately turned and made her escape. Shortly after Brown learned that the *Queen* had been repaired by her captors and put in service, and that two other steamers were cruising in company with her.

The *Era* returned to the neighborhood of Vicksburg, where she arrived on the 21st. Here Ellet left her under the protection of the army outpost near the mouth of the canal and crossed the point on the west bank to report in person to the admiral the series of disasters. Porter immediately ordered him to take a second ram, the *Switzerland*, up the river and procure cotton bales for protecting her machinery, with a view to her running the batteries and taking the place of the *Queen* in the river below.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime the *Indianola* had also started up the river toward Vicksburg, but owing to her two coal-barges her progress against the current was slow. On the night of the 24th, when she had nearly reached Warrenton, she was overtaken by a force of the enemy composed of the *Webb*, the *Queen*, and two cotton-clad steamers filled with troops. Brown hung on to his coal-barges, which were lashed alongside and which seriously impeded his movements; but as soon as he made out the enemy coming to the attack, he turned and stood down for them. The fight was between the two rams and the *Indianola*, which, although by far the more pow-

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, Army, xxiv, 3, 77.

erful ship, put herself by this movement completely at their mercy. To attempt to engage two active and alert rams at night, with two coal-barges lashed alongside, was to invite destruction. While she succeeded in ramming the Webb once and injuring her considerably, the Indianola did not disable her, and her shots fell wild in the darkness, apparently none of them striking her nimble adversaries. The first blow from the Queen cut through one of the coal-barges. The first from the Webb cut through the other. In all, they struck the Indianola seven times, and the last two blows crushed her stern so that water came in in large volume. Brown then ran his vessel into the bank and surrendered her, her stern being then under water.

Porter was now very seriously concerned about the situation. He had sent down twelve guns, as he said in his report to the department, to contend with three. And he added:

There is no use to conceal the fact, but this has, in my opinion, been the most humiliating affair that has occurred during this rebellion, and, after taking so much trouble to make matters sure, it almost disheartens me and puts me out of the conceit of sending off any expedition unless I can go with it. I certainly had a right to expect that two vessels carrying twelve guns that had passed all the batteries at Vicksburg, Warrenton, Carthage, and other places on the river could manage between them to take one old steamer, or else have the wisdom and patriotism to destroy their vessels, even if they had to go with them. . . . Had the Indianola thrown off her coal-barges and run up-stream with the speed she is reported to have, she could have disabled both the rams with her two 11-inch guns in iron casemate before either of them could get alongside her. They tracked her along from point to point, found out exactly how she was operating, and made their disposition accordingly.



If this experience was to be continued, the only result of sending vessels below Vicksburg would be to turn them over to the enemy, to the extent of gradually giving him control of the Mississippi squadron, and thus reversing the condition of affairs on the river. Yet matters could not be left where they were, and some means must be devised not only to recover control of the river, but to prevent the enemy from repairing the *Indianola*. On the day following the battle her officers and crew were landed and sent to Jackson as prisoners. The captured vessel was towed down a short distance and run ashore on the bank. Here a working party of one hundred Confederates under a lieutenant, with two field-pieces, was detailed to go on board of her to patch her up and float her off. She lay on an island four or five miles around a bend in the river below New Carthage, and with her were the *Webb* and the two cotton-clads which had taken part in her capture. At the same time the *Queen of the West* was sent to Warrenton, and her appearance there was the first intimation received by the National forces of disaster to the *Indianola*. The *Queen's* presence at Warrenton, combined with the fact that heavy firing had been heard about New Carthage on the previous night, justified the gravest apprehensions for the *Indianola's* safety, although the fact of her capture had not at this time been reported.<sup>1</sup>

Not only was the question serious on account of the loss of the *Indianola*, but Porter saw that the position of the fleet itself at the Yazoo mouth might become one of great danger. At the moment no vessels of the ram flotilla were with the squadron. The *Queen* was in the

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<sup>1</sup> Grant's despatch to Halleck, February 25, 1863, War Records, Army, xxiv, 1, 18; Porter's letter to Ellet, February 25, 1863, War Records, Army, xxiv, 3, 77.



enemy's hands. The Switzerland had just been sent up the river to prepare herself for passing below, and the others were patrolling the Mississippi and protecting the lines of communication at various points above. It was evident that the Webb and the Queen, whoever was in command of them, were being handled with great boldness and skill, and they might have other consorts. The Queen had already arrived at Warrenton. There was no reason why both the Confederate rams should not proceed up to Vicksburg, where they could lie in perfect security at the wharves of the city, and whence they could issue at night up the river, perhaps with the Indianola, and make a raid on the fleet at the Yazoo mouth, or the transports at Young's Point, with disastrous results. Accordingly, Porter, though as yet he knew nothing, formed his surmises with remarkable accuracy, and on the morning after the battle of the Indianola sent this despatch to Ellet:

*February 25, 1863.*

Return here without a moment's delay. The Queen is up at Warrenton. Heavy firing last night below here. The presumption is that the Indianola is sunk or captured. Hurry down. Wait for nothing. We have nothing to meet the ram. Bring the Monarch also, if she is within hail, but do not wait for anything.

In the meantime, however, Porter had carried out another plan, which was one of the most characteristic and original in his whole career—a plan which was a piece of highly successful strategy, but which seemed on the impudent face of it nothing more than a huge practical joke. It was done at a moment when any other commanding officer would have been preoccupied with the gravest apprehensions, as well as profoundly impressed by the certainty of one disaster and the expecta-

tion of news of another. But Porter was never really depressed under any circumstances, and his first thought always was to get his resources under control, and to take instant and energetic measures to develop them to their best advantage and fullest capacity. Hence his despatch to Ellet. But his buoyant nature went beyond this, for at the very moment when everything seemed to be ending in irretrievable calamity his spirits so entirely rose above the crisis that he was able not only to perform the most ingenious strategic movement, but to interject into it a spirit of sardonic humor that was colossal in its audacity.

It happened that at this very time Porter had been desirous of discovering more exactly the position of the Vicksburg batteries, and was looking about for some method of drawing their fire without injuring his vessels. Accordingly, he had put the whole squadron at work and constructed a raft of logs three hundred feet long, building up the sides like a ship's rail, and erected upon it a log house for a casemate with port-holes, from which protruded enormous wooden guns. Forward and aft of the casemate were placed large round structures of canvas stretched on frames, making an imitation of monitor turrets. Huge smoke-stacks were built in the center by fastening pork barrels one above another, and within each stack was an iron pot filled with tar and oakum. At midnight of the 24th fires were lighted in the tar furnaces, which raised a dense smoke, and the dummy monitor was towed down close to the water-batteries at Vicksburg and set adrift.

Of course the craft was immediately discovered by her smoke, and all the batteries in Vicksburg opened fire on her. Their suspicions might have been aroused by the fact that she passed on in dignified silence, without

returning the fire or giving any other sign of life. How many times she was struck is not recorded, but at any rate her precarious smoke-stacks remained in place, and her powers of locomotion, such as they were, were not destroyed. After passing the batteries the monitor was caught in an eddy and drifted ashore on the west bank near the Union outpost below the mouth of the canal. This was about six o'clock in the morning.<sup>1</sup> Here she was shoved off by the troops at the post, after labors that occupied some hours, and continued her course down the river.

The Queen of the West, lying at Warrenton, whither she had gone with despatches and also to warn the Confederate boats below of the arrival of the gunboat which it was expected Porter would send down, received word by telegraph from Vicksburg of the passage of the monitor, and when the dummy arrived in sight she incontinently fled down the river. On her way down she only paused at the Indianola to give notice of the approach of the supposed ironclad, upon which the Webb and her two consorts, according to the report of Colonel Wirt Adams, the famous Mississippi cavalry leader, "at once got under way in a panic and proceeded down the river, abandoning without a word the working party and field-pieces on the wreck."<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, at this juncture the dummy monitor went ashore a couple of miles above the Indianola; otherwise, the people on board could not have failed to discover her true character. "The Federal vessel," says Adams in his report of March 1st, "did not approach nearer than two and a half miles, and appeared very apprehensive of attack. The position of the Indianola was such that her two 11-inch Dahlgren guns com-

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<sup>1</sup> Hassler's report, War Records, Army, xxiv, 3, 67.

<sup>2</sup> War Records, Army, xxiv, 1, 370.

manded the river above and the two 9-inch guns could also have been brought in battery. With the assistance of our two vessels, the *Queen of the West* and *Webb*, there is scarcely a doubt that we could have saved the *Indianola* and possibly have captured the other gunboat of the enemy." Even as late as the 1st of March, four days after the event, Colonel Adams had not yet discovered the sham character of the monitor.

The lieutenant in command of the working party made some effort to free the *Indianola* of water, but finding himself abandoned by the fleet, and after watching the monitor for several hours, lying in her stationary position, a terrible menace, he allowed his apprehensions to get the better of him, and on the night of the 26th determined to abandon the vessel. The two 9-inch guns of the *Indianola* were thrown overboard and the two 11-inch were loaded with shot, placed muzzle to muzzle, and so fired. The field-pieces were also thrown overboard, and an attempt was made to blow up the ship, which resulted in wrecking the casemate and sinking the hull in the shoal water off the bank. This destruction completed, the whole party fled to the shore. Twenty-five of them who disappeared were supposed by Adams "to have been captured by the crew of the last Federal gunboat. The others have been straggling into my camp for two or three days. The valuable armament, the large supplies of powder, shot, and shell, are all lost. With the exception of the wine and liquor stores of the *Indianola* nothing was saved." When Porter's fleet passed the Vicksburg batteries on the 16th of April they found the wreck of the *Indianola* still lying below New Carthage at the point where she had been sunk.

The results accomplished by the dummy monitor were of vital importance. She prevented one of the most

powerful vessels of the squadron with all her equipment from falling practically uninjured into the enemy's hands. That portion of the stores of the *Indianola* of which alone the enemy retained possession did not greatly benefit him in the operations of the war. It was a long time before the Confederate authorities could rid themselves of the idea that the National forces had another ironclad below Vicksburg. The accounts of the Vicksburg newspapers testify to the extreme perplexity into which they fell in endeavoring to clear up the situation.

When Admiral Farragut heard of the disasters which had attended the attempt to blockade the Red River he recurred to his instructions of five months before, which, indeed, he had been for a long time intending to carry out, and determined to take a strong force past Port Hudson and himself assume the direction of affairs at the Red River. Having no particular enterprise on hand, as Porter had, which occupied his entire squadron, he was able to assign for the expedition a number of vessels so powerful as to insure its success, provided Port Hudson could be safely passed. For this purpose, on the night of the 14th of March he moved up four of his large ships, the *Hartford*, *Richmond*, *Monongahela*, and *Mississippi*, with three gunboats, to a point immediately below Port Hudson, and attempted the passage. It is to be noticed as a significant commentary upon the suggestion that he had opposed the use of mortars at New Orleans, that he employed them at Port Hudson, and in precisely the same way. It was Farragut's motto that "the best protection against the enemy's fire is a well-directed fire by our own guns." This motto, says Captain Mahan,<sup>1</sup> "was in itself an epitome of the art of war, and in pursuance of it the fires of the mortar-schoon-

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<sup>1</sup> Life of Admiral Farragut, p. 220.

ers and of the Essex were carefully combined by the admiral with that of the squadron."

The Essex and the mortar-boats served the same purpose at Port Hudson that the flotilla and the mortar-boats had served at New Orleans, with the advantage that the Essex was an ironclad, and therefore her work was incomparably less dangerous than that of Porter's gunboats against Fort Jackson. The captain of the Essex reported that "the effect of the fire of the mortar-vessels seemed to paralyze the efforts of the enemy at the lower batteries, and we observed that their fire was quite feeble compared to that of the upper batteries"—words which would serve equally well to express the result at New Orleans. Notwithstanding these precautions, the difficulties of the passage were such, that out of Farragut's seven vessels only two got by, the Hartford and her attendant gunboat, the Albatross. The others suffered serious injury, and finally withdrew, but not until the Mississippi had been destroyed.

Farragut now found himself in the Hartford with a single gunboat in the Red River territory, but his difficulties, owing to the failure of the rest of the fleet to pass the batteries, were somewhat similar to those of the isolated vessels which had come down on the same errand from above. His first care was to steam up to the neighborhood of Vicksburg and obtain from the fleet above—the only source from which he could get them—the coal and provisions that he needed. His wants being supplied by sending down barges at night past the batteries, he urgently asked for reenforcements.

At this time Porter was absent on the Steele's Bayou expedition, and was therefore in no position to attend to Farragut's wants. General A. W. Ellet, however, commanding the Marine Brigade, on the morning of March



26th assumed the responsibility of sending down two vessels belonging to the ram flotilla, the Lancaster and Switzerland. The mistake was made not only of choosing a clear night for the passage, but of delaying it until near daylight, so that the boats did not get past before the sun had risen. The result was that the Lancaster was sunk and became a total loss. The Switzerland had her boiler exploded but managed to get through and was repaired and added to Farragut's squadron.

In one of Grant's letters to Farragut, written about this time, he expresses strongly his judgment as to the importance of continuing the blockade of the Red River. He said: "I see by Southern papers received yesterday that Vicksburg must depend upon Louisiana or west of the Mississippi for supplies. Holding Red River from them is a great step in the direction of preventing this, but it will not entirely accomplish the object. New Carthage should be held, and it seems to me that in addition we should have vessels sufficient below to patrol the whole river from Warrenton to the Red River. I will have a consultation with Admiral Porter on the subject. *I am happy to say the admiral and myself have never yet disagreed upon any policy.*"<sup>1</sup>

Porter on his return immediately after also wrote to Farragut on the same subject, saying that his services in maintaining the Red River blockade would be "worth to us the loss of the Mississippi." Shortly after Farragut returned down the river with the Albatross and the Switzerland, and on the 2d of April anchored off the mouth of the Red River, of which he maintained a blockade during the remainder of the month of April.

In the meantime events were occurring both above and below that materially changed the situation. On

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, Army, xxiv, 3, 148.



the 16th of April Porter's fleet passed below Vicksburg, and a few days later attacked Grand Gulf and convoyed the army across the river to Bruinsburg. On the other hand, on the 20th of April Butte-à-la-Rose, on the Atchafalaya, was captured by National gunboats operating from the south, and a side entrance was thus opened through to the Red River by which vessels could pass from the Gulf without entering the Mississippi. General Banks immediately determined on an expedition to attack the city of Alexandria, the great depot of the Confederates on the Red River. For this purpose he wanted the cooperation of the navy. Farragut now had with him, besides the Hartford, the Albatross, and the ram Switzerland, two other light gunboats which had come in from the Atchafalaya, the Arizona and the Estrella. None of these vessels could afford the required support to Banks, the Hartford being too heavy and the others too light. Farragut having then learned of the arrival of the squadron below Vicksburg, wrote "a most imploring appeal," as he describes it, to Porter to send him two or more gunboats.<sup>1</sup> But Porter had far too serious work on hand at the time to comply. Banks united in these appeals. He said to Farragut:

It is of vital importance that we occupy the Red River exclusively to Alexandria. Your boats and those at Grand Gulf will accomplish it beyond the possibility of failure. I pray God they will send them to you. I can not hold this country alone. Appeal to the boats at Grand Gulf again to assist us.<sup>2</sup>

In consequence of Farragut's urgent appeal Porter determined to go to him the moment that the necessities of the Vicksburg campaign permitted. General

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, Army, xv, 308.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 309.

Grant was now engaged in the operations against Jackson to reach Vicksburg from the east. Accordingly, when Porter, arriving on May 3 at Grand Gulf for the purpose of attacking it, found it evacuated, he set out within an hour's time for Red River. He took with him the Benton, which was still his flag-ship, the Lafayette, Pittsburg, and the ram General Price. He covered the two hundred miles to the mouth of the Red River with all speed, and arrived there at one o'clock the next morning. Here he found Farragut with the Hartford, the three small gunboats being engaged at the time in a reconnaissance up the Red River. Farragut restored to him the Switzerland, and with his five vessels he immediately ascended the river, picking up two of Farragut's light gunboats on the way up.

On arriving at Fort De Russy, the upper rebel fort on the Red River, he found it already deserted. He used the Price to ram through the barrier and continued his course up the river, reaching Alexandria on the morning of the 7th, and took possession of the city. General Banks, who had not expected such celerity of movement, arrived with his army that night, and Porter turned the city over to him.

Porter did not linger long at Alexandria. He had taken serious chances in leaving Grand Gulf, where his support would be badly needed if Grant should meet with reverses, and nothing but the urgency of the call made upon him would have led him to run the risk. The water in the Red River was now beginning to fall, and deeming it prudent to take his heavy flag-ship to the river mouth, he dropped down the river to Fort De Russy, where he stayed sufficiently long to accomplish the destruction of its battery. The Price, with the Pittsburg and the smaller gunboats, was sent up Black River under

Woodworth to make a reconnaissance and destroy the vast quantity of stores which were on and about that river. These operations completed, Porter, who had no time to delay, left Captain Walke in the *Lafayette* at Alexandria with the *Pittsburg*, *Switzerland*, *Arizona*, and *Estrella*, to cooperate with General Banks and to maintain the blockade, and himself returned with the *Benton* and the *Price* to Grand Gulf, where his presence had now become necessary. He had been absent nine days, during which, with a small expenditure of resources, he had struck an effective blow in the heart of the trans-Mississippi country.

From this date until the 4th of July Porter was fully absorbed in the operations against Vicksburg, but during all the time he was called upon to provide for the requirements of the campaign at other points. As far back as April he had stationed a force under Selfridge in the *Conestoga* with several light-drafts at the mouth of the Arkansas River, from which and from the White River, emptying into the Mississippi near by, attacks were constantly threatened. A long neck of land separated the two rivers, and Porter approved Selfridge's suggestion that a cut-off should be made by which the channel might be carried through the neck, so that a single force could cover both rivers. This was done and proved remarkably successful, Selfridge passing through with his vessels the day after he made the cut-off.

On the 4th of July, the very day that Vicksburg surrendered, an important engagement took place at Helena, and one which showed in a remarkable degree the efficiency of the gunboats. By this time Porter had found means to obtain early information of movements of the enemy on the west bank, and on the 21st of June he learned that the Confederate General Price was moving

through Arkansas toward the river with a large force, including artillery, for the purpose of seizing upon some point, cutting off the transports, and relieving Vicksburg. Foreseeing that Helena would be the probable point of attack, Porter sent two gunboats, the Tyler and the Bragg, to cooperate in the defense of the place, although General Prentiss, who commanded ashore with an army of thirty-five hundred men, had no apprehension of an enemy's approach.

Porter had correctly surmised, and on the 4th of July General Price attacked Helena with fifteen thousand men and succeeded in driving in the small force opposed to him, getting possession of an outlying fort and its guns. Thereupon the Tyler, which was commanded by a very gallant and capable young officer, Lieutenant-Commander James M. Pritchett, opened on Price's troops with her heavy battery at easy range. The formation of the ground in a succession of ravines was favorable to the Tyler, enabling her to enfilade the ravines. The result was that the enemy, caught in the gullies and unable to avoid the fire of the gunboat, were repulsed with great slaughter, and Helena was saved.

Ten days later Porter received an order from the chief of the Bureau of Equipment to discharge all men belonging to the Army of the Potomac. As the Mississippi squadron had been originally under the charge of the War Department, and its nucleus had been organized by the army, detachments of enlisted men from the army had contributed in large part to its original crews. Many of these men who had been with it from the beginning had since been trained to the highest point of efficiency, and, as far as the river service was concerned, they constituted veteran man-of-war's men, whose discharge would go far to break up the organization of the

squadron. Porter replied to the Secretary, pointing out the vital injury which it would work to the efficiency of the squadron, and said that it would compel him to lay up some of his boats. He added: "I thought perhaps the order a mistake, and shall await further instructions on the subject from the department." In consequence of Porter's representations the order was withdrawn.

Porter was now in a position to take efficient steps to clear out the Red River. He organized an expedition of light-drafts, including the Manitou, Rattler, Forest Rose, and Petrel, under Selfridge. Selfridge divided his force, sending part of them up the Black River and part up the Tensas, two tributaries of the Red River which run for two hundred miles parallel with the Mississippi and not far to the west of it. Here they succeeded in capturing or destroying four steamers at different points and an immense quantity of stores. At Trinity Selfridge also captured a large depot of ammunition. This expedition crippled the resources of the Confederate army in northeastern Louisiana.

About the same time the fleet sustained a severe loss in the destruction of the De Kalb in the Yazoo River by a torpedo. This vessel, which had done so much good service under her able commander, Walker, first at Arkansas Post, then at Yazoo Pass, and finally in the Yazoo River, was making her third expedition in that quarter for the purpose of destroying such of the enemy's boats as still remained. In all, twenty-two of these boats had been destroyed or sunk in the Yazoo and its tributaries since the fall of the Yazoo forts. The De Kalb was too much damaged to save her hull, her bow and stern having been torn to pieces by two separate torpedoes, but her guns and mounts and a part of her machinery were removed by Porter's directions.

Though the admiral lost one vessel, a short time after he recovered another. Late in July he determined to raise the Cincinnati. The work was pursued night and day for a week, and the vessel was fairly dug out of the mud, of which she was full to her upper deck. Every article in her was saved, and before the admiral left Vicksburg he had the pleasure of seeing her again afloat.

During this same month of July Porter's attention was directed to a point far away from his most active operations. The daring raid of the Confederate General Morgan across the Ohio River, in which he traversed the States of Indiana and Ohio, creating a panic throughout that part of the country, was finally brought to an end through the efforts of the gunboats of the squadron. Lieutenant-Commander Leroy Fitch, with extraordinary promptness and energy, chased Morgan's guerrilla army five hundred miles up the Ohio, finally intercepting him and frustrating his attempt to recross the river, took possession of his train and his guns, routed his force, and made possible his final capture.

It is impossible to follow out here the innumerable operations which Porter directed during the remainder of the year. During all this period his vessels were actively engaged at the most widely remote points, in many cases more than a thousand miles apart: on the Ohio from Cincinnati to Cairo, on the Mississippi from Cairo to New Orleans, on the Red River as high as Alexandria, on its immense tributaries, the Black, the Tensas, and the Ouachita, on the Arkansas and the White Rivers, and finally on the Tennessee and the Cumberland. On the 16th of July he received word from Farragut that the department had instructed the latter to turn over the lower Mississippi to Porter. Accordingly, at the end of

July Porter proceeded down the river in the Black Hawk and arrived on the 1st of August at New Orleans just before Farragut sailed for the North on a protracted leave of absence. Leaving New Orleans again on the 5th, he arrived on the 16th at Cairo. On the way up he studied the question of the disposition of his forces to meet the Confederate practise of stationing flying batteries near the river to attack the transports as they went by.

It was upon this journey, on the 10th of August, that Porter received his commission as rear-admiral, dating from the 4th of July, the day of the surrender of Vicksburg and the consummation of all his efforts. By this promotion he became the sixth officer on the list of the navy, the rear-admirals above him being Farragut, Goldsborough, Du Pont, Davis, and Dahlgren. Arriving at Cairo, he found a letter from the department granting him an extended leave of absence. His action upon this permission was characteristic. Notwithstanding the almost superhuman labors and fatigues which he had undergone during his nine months in the unwholesome climate of the Mississippi, he declined the Secretary's offer, and said, in making his acknowledgments: "While there is a prospect of anything to be done I do not desire to leave my post. I have still a great deal to do to regulate the different stations, and if the department will permit me, will take some more favorable opportunity to avail myself of the leave."

The opportunity, however, never came, and Porter remained actively occupied with the management of the squadron for another year, until he was transferred to a more important command. His first care was to create a local administrative organization. For this purpose he divided his command into eight districts: the first from New Orleans to Donaldsonville; the second



to the Red River; the third to Natchez; the fourth to Vicksburg; the fifth to the White River; the sixth to Cairo; the seventh to the head of the Tennessee River; and the eighth the Cumberland River to its source, together with the upper Ohio. Each of these districts was placed in command of an officer upon whom the admiral could rely, and to each were assigned the vessels which in number and character seemed best adapted for the service required in the locality. About the same time the admiral recommended to the department that the restrictions on commerce should be removed, hoping that a revival of trade would bring about a better state of feeling. Strict orders were issued, however, in reference to landing on the river-banks in the enemy's country, and the dangers of such excursions were plainly pointed out. On a Sunday shortly after, when Acting-Master Fentress, commanding the *Rattler*, to gratify a laudable desire, went to church at Rodney, in Mississippi, with another officer and fifteen men, and was captured by guerrillas, Porter, in reporting the fact to the department, said: "I feel no sympathy whatever for Mr. Fentress, but regret the loss of those with him."

In September the admiral made a careful inspection of the lower Mississippi. General Banks was contemplating at this time, as he had been for several months before, a campaign in northern Louisiana, along the line of the Red River. Porter found the stream quite dry in many places, and determined that nothing could be done by the fleet at that season. It would be necessary to wait until the winter rains should raise the river, six months later. If these rains should be at all comparable to those of the previous winter, the navigation of the upper Red River would then be an easy matter. In the meantime the admiral continued to direct the

New Orleans Aug 1<sup>st</sup>  
= 1863

Sir

I have the honor to  
inform you that I have  
communicated with Messrs  
Loring & Co, and assumed the  
charge of the Mississippi  
down to New Orleans. The  
River is entirely free from  
Gambusia, and merchant  
boats can travel it  
without danger

Very Respectfully  
yours W. H.  
Devin D. Porter  
New Orleans

Wm

Genl. Cuth

Secretary of the Navy  
Washington City



work of the squadron, most of the time from Cairo, with occasional absences, at points that required his attention. The only interruption of his duties—and this was not really an interruption—was during a fortnight which he spent at Cincinnati to make an examination of the new ironclads then in course of construction, of which he made a long and exhaustive report to the department.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE RED RIVER EXPEDITION

IN the winter of 1863-'64 it was finally decided that a combined military and naval movement should be made by the Red River to Shreveport, in northwestern Louisiana. The Confederate force in this region under General Kirby Smith amounted to over twenty thousand men, and Banks's force of seventeen thousand men was to be reenforced by ten thousand additional troops from Sherman's army under General A. J. Smith. The two portions of the army, with the squadron, were to meet on the 17th of March at Alexandria, three hundred and fifty miles by the river below Shreveport and half that distance by land.

The passage of the fleet up the Red River at this time, which was essential to the success of the army's operation, had in it one great element of doubt and danger, the depth of the water. In ordinary seasons the river was navigable for vessels of the size of Porter's gunboats only during the early spring. The shoalest point was just above Alexandria, between one and two hundred miles from the river mouth, where two rapids, called the Falls of Alexandria, formed a complete obstruction to navigation during a great part of the year. The usual depth above Alexandria was only four feet, but the spring rise, upon which Porter counted for the success of the expedition, would ordinarily give ample water for

his ironclads, which drew about eight feet. During February and March of the year before the water had been exceptionally high in the Mississippi Valley and had suddenly fallen in April. This year, however, the rise had been unusually backward, and the time in which active operations were practicable for the gunboats was therefore cut short. Moreover, the detachment from Sherman's army could only be spared for a limited time. There was therefore a double reason for promptness and celerity.

On the 2d of March Porter was at the mouth of the Red River with the cooperating naval force. As it included all the best vessels of the Mississippi squadron, the contemplated movement up the Red River for a distance of over five hundred miles was attended with great risk. The river was narrow and crooked, with high banks advantageous for attacks by a land force, and its course lay through the heart of the enemy's country. But the serious danger came from the possibility that the water might not rise, or, worse still, that, having risen sufficiently to permit the ascent, it might then fall and leave the squadron stranded. In such a contingency the only way to prevent the capture of the squadron would be to destroy it. Under these circumstances Porter might well have declined to go up on learning the existing conditions, but he was not a man to turn back after he had once started on an undertaking until he was sure that he had to, and he could only be sure by actually making the experiment.

On the 11th General A. J. Smith, with his detachment of ten thousand men from General Sherman's command at Vicksburg, arrived at the mouth of the Red River, and early on the morning of the 12th the fleet began the ascent. The Confederates had rebuilt Fort De

Russy, the battery destroyed by Porter in the previous year, and had thrown up a few miles below it a heavy barrier of piles and timber that was supposed to render the river impassable. The army was landed at Simsport, the barrier was opened by ramming, the fort was captured by the troops, and on the 15th the Eastport, the advance vessel, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Phelps, arrived at Alexandria. On the morning of the 16th she was joined by eight other gunboats, and Phelps landed a force under Selfridge to occupy the town and seize the Confederate property. This force was in occupation when Porter arrived in the afternoon, the greater part of Smith's troops coming up at the same time in their transports, while the rest remained behind to complete the destruction of Fort De Russy.

The squadron had now made good its promise to be at Alexandria by the 17th. In fact, it had rather more than made it good. Smith's force also, or a portion of it, was a day in advance of the time set for the rendezvous. The main army under General Banks, however, coming by way of Opelousas, did not arrive until ten days later.

Immediately after the arrival of the fleet the admiral, without waiting for Banks, turned his attention to getting the thirteen gunboats which he had selected for the advance over the falls above the city. This he only accomplished by making great efforts, and, as it turned out, it would have been better if he had not accomplished it at all. The Eastport took nearly three days in passing, and was hauled over by main force. A hospital steamer belonging to the marine brigade was wrecked. The last of the gunboats and transports only effected the passage on April 3d. The transports carried General Smith's force, which was to proceed by water as far as Grand Ecore, about half-way between Alexandria and Shreve-



port, and thither they were accompanied by the squadron. The thirteen gunboats selected comprised the Eastport and Chillicothe; the four Eads gunboats, Carondelet, Louisville, Pittsburg, and Mound City; the three river monitors, Osage, Ozark, and Neosho; and four of the light boats, the Fort Hindman, Cricket, Juliet, and Lexington. Banks's army marched up from Alexandria by the south bank, and the forces afloat and ashore met at Grand Ecore on the 4th of April. Here Smith's corps was landed, with the exception of one division, which remained in the transports. The latter thereupon proceeded to Springfield Landing, one hundred and ten miles farther up the river, and only forty miles in a straight line from Shreveport. At Springfield, Porter, by previous arrangement with Banks, was to await the arrival of the army. Although the distances were so great by the river, the army had but a few days' march by land from Grand Ecore to Shreveport. As the river showed no sign of rising, Porter left seven of his thirteen vessels at Grand Ecore and took up with him to Springfield Landing only the Fort Hindman, Lexington, Osage, Neosho, and Chillicothe, with the diminutive light-draft Cricket as his temporary flag-ship. On the way up the gunboats suffered from the attacks of guerillas on the banks, in one of which the Chillicothe lost her captain, Lieutenant Couthouy, one of the gallant volunteer officers who did such good work on the western rivers. The detachment arrived at Springfield Landing on the afternoon of the 10th.

Before the arrival of the National forces at Alexandria the Confederates under General Richard Taylor had retreated up the south bank, their movements being directed by General Kirby Smith, in chief command, whose headquarters were at Shreveport. Banks took up his

line of march and proceeded with his army drawn out in a straggling column. Taylor took a strong position at Sabine Cross-roads, a few miles below Springfield Landing, where the gunboats and transports were soon to arrive. Here on the 8th of April he attacked and forced back Banks's advance, and the battle was only saved from becoming a rout by the gallant stand made by General Emory at the close of the day. The next day the army withdrew to a position at Pleasant Hill, where it was again attacked by the Confederates, now commanded by Kirby Smith in person. The action that ensued was a complete victory for the Union forces, the credit for the victory being mainly due to General A. J. Smith. The Confederates were broken and demoralized—"paralyzed," said General Kirby Smith in his report—and a sharp and swift pursuit would without doubt have resulted in the fall of Shreveport. On the night before, however, in consequence of the repulse at Sabine Cross-roads, General Banks had determined to fall back, and had sent word to Porter at Springfield Landing to withdraw down the river. After the second day's fight Banks wavered in his determination, and was strongly urged by A. J. Smith to go on, but he finally decided to return, and accordingly put his troops in motion for Grand Ecore.

Then began the retreat of the fleet down the Red River, the most difficult and dangerous operation in which Porter was ever engaged, and the one in which perhaps more than in any other were displayed his unfailing tenacity and energy. The water was now falling; the gunboats were in the center of the enemy's country; the troops were in full retreat, and the commander-in-chief of the squadron, without information as to the resources and position of the rebels, was to bring

down his force of twenty transports and thirteen gunboats—seven of the latter being below at Grand Ecore—on a river difficult of navigation at all times from its narrow and crooked course, but doubly so now when there was hardly enough water to float the vessels.

The admiral could only infer from the retreat of Banks's splendid army that the enemy were ready to come down upon him in force and to contest his passage of the river; and this proved to be true. Although after the battle Kirby Smith had withdrawn the main body of his army to Arkansas to meet the approach of General Steele, who was to have cooperated with Banks in the attack upon Shreveport, a sufficient force was left with Taylor to operate against the returning gunboats. Banks's precipitate retreat brought him to Grand Ecore on the 11th. On the morning of this day the fleet, with the transports, had barely started from Springfield Landing. The banks of the river were entirely open to the enemy, a fact of which they were not slow to take advantage; and the fleet had therefore in its retreat to overcome their harassing attacks, as well as the difficulties of navigation. For this wholly unnecessary abandonment of the force afloat, which included his own transports and part of his troops, Banks was roundly criticized by Porter, and the justice of the criticism can not be doubted.

The retreat of the advance division of gunboats from Springfield to Grand Ecore began on the night of the 10th, the very day on which they had arrived. The transports were started out in a long line along which Porter distributed his half-dozen gunboats, the Osage under Selfridge bringing up the rear. At starting Porter directed the transports to back down the river in the order in which they lay, the rearmost boat to take the lead downstream, and they were turned one by one in the course

of the night, as the bayous and the pockets of the river afforded room for the operation. The falling waters were beginning to disclose the drift on the edges of the stream, and the logs and snags in its bed. During the whole of the 11th the fleet made but little progress.

On the next day, April 12th, the fleet started at seven o'clock in the morning, most of the transports being in a partially crippled condition, with their rudders unshipped and wheels broken. Their troubles were now increased by the annoying attacks of the enemy on the river-banks. About noon the Confederate General Liddell appeared on the north bank with a considerable force and opened upon the fleet with musketry. By a proper distribution of the gunboats Porter succeeded in driving them away, but as he continued down the river they increased in numbers and harassed the fleet all the way to Grand Ecore.

At four o'clock, as the fleet reached Blair's Landing, General Thomas Green, the foremost cavalry leader of the Southwest, with a large force of the enemy, took position upon the south bank. Just before their approach the transport Hastings had become disabled and had run into the right bank for repairs. Another transport, the Alice Vivian, had got aground midway in the stream. Three other transports were endeavoring to assist the Vivian, and the monitor Osage was in tow of the transport Black Hawk alongside of her, when the ironclad also went fast aground. Such was the position of affairs when Green came up with his force of over two thousand men and made a vigorous attack. The soldiers on the transports threw up breastworks of cotton bales, bales of hay, and oat sacks, while the Osage and Lexington awaited the enemy's approach. Porter ordered all the transports except those engaged with the Vivian to pass

down the river, and as the enemy formed on the bank the gunboats opened on them with grape and canister. Fortunately, the Lexington was neither grounded nor disabled, and her commander, Lieutenant Bache, the same who had fought the Cincinnati so gallantly at Vicksburg, stationed her to the best advantage and opened a cross-fire upon the enemy. The transports made use of such artillery as they had on board.

The fight lasted for an hour and a half. Everything that was made of wood on the Osage and her accompanying transport was pierced with bullets, the pilot-house of the ironclad alone showing more than sixty marks. The enemy finally retreated after a loss of four hundred killed and wounded, General Green being among the killed. Of the conduct of Selfridge and Bache in the action the admiral spoke with the warmest commendation.

No sooner was this engagement over than the admiral found himself involved in another. The transports which had been directed to proceed on from Blair's Landing found themselves again stopped a short distance below—this time by a battery of 6-pounders which General Liddell had placed in position on a commanding height on the north bank. Opening upon the battery with a vigorous shell-fire, the admiral silenced it sufficiently to enable the transports to get by, and brought up the rear with the gunboats.

The next morning, the 13th, Porter was following down in the Cricket when the fleet was again delayed by the grounding of a transport. Liddell's force again came up and opened upon the fleet with his 6-pounders, and once more the attack was repulsed, this time by the Osage. On arriving at Campti, ten miles above Grand Ecore, Porter pushed ahead in the Cricket, and

induced General Smith to bring up troops to keep off the guerrillas. The Cricket was fired upon on her way down, but the subsequent arrival of the troops enabled the transports to come through without further trouble. The Hindman was left behind with the grounded transport and finally brought her off. By the night of the 15th the entire advance division, including all the transports and the six gunboats, had arrived at Grand Ecore without the loss of a vessel. Here they found the seven boats which had been left behind during their perilous expedition to Springfield.

The next stage of the retreat, from Grand Ecore to Alexandria, was a distance of one hundred and fifty miles. The conditions of the navigation were similar to those which the fleet had found above, but at the end of the journey came the Falls of Alexandria, the passage of which required a rise of several feet in the river. This annual rise had invariably taken place except once, in the year 1846, and Porter had the ill fortune to strike the very season eighteen years afterward when the experience was repeated. Notwithstanding the critical situation of the gunboats, General Banks gave orders, on April 21st, for the army to move on to Alexandria, which would leave the river-banks below open to the enemy to continue their attacks.

Long before this order was given, Porter had started to get the vessels over the bar below Grand Ecore, the Eastport leading the way down the river. Three weeks before, the Confederates had placed torpedoes<sup>1</sup> in the river a few miles below the bar, and although these had been passed successfully by the fleet on the way up, the Eastport had the misfortune to strike one of them going down. Owing to the shallowness of the water she could

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<sup>1</sup> May's report, War Records, Army, xxxiv, i, 505.



not sink very far, and Porter, going down immediately to examine her, found the water partly over her gun-deck. He did not for a moment despair of saving the vessel, but no time was to be lost. Before going up the river he had sent for two steam pump-boats to come up to Alexandria and remain there in readiness for just such a contingency. Although it was one hundred and fifty miles down, the admiral concluded that the best way to make sure of them would be to go for them himself. He accordingly steamed down alone in the Cricket at full speed, arrived at Alexandria on the 17th, and immediately despatched one of the pump-boats to the Eastport.

During the few hours that Porter remained at Alexandria he found urgent demands upon his attention from all quarters. Here he first learned of the success of the expedition which he had previously sent up the Ouachita under Foster in the Lafayette, which had captured three thousand bales of cotton, brought away eight hundred negroes, and destroyed much property. Here he also learned of the attack on Fort Pillow, situated above Memphis on the Mississippi, eight hundred miles away, which had been left with an insufficient garrison, and which had yielded to a sudden raid of the enemy. To retrieve this disaster and to provide for the safety of Mound City and Paducah, now threatened with attack in his absence, he immediately sent away the four large ironclads which had been left in the lower stretches of the Red River, the Benton, Essex, Lafayette, and Choctaw. To take the place of the gunboats that were delayed above in their slow retreat, he brought up some of his light-drafts from below. Having accomplished these and other arrangements during the few busy hours that he remained at Alexandria, he hurried back to the East-



port in the Cricket, taking the second pump-boat along with him.

On his first visit to the Eastport Porter had ordered all her guns taken out and her ammunition transferred to the other vessels. When he returned this had been done, and the two heavy steam-pumps were set to work; but both together could not do more than slightly decrease the water in the vessel. The only way to stop the leak was by bulkheading, which was accomplished by Phelps and his crew with great labor, the admiral supervising the operation. He says of this in his frank and generous way in his report: "I do not think I ever witnessed harder work than was performed by the officers and crew of the Eastport, and it seemed to be the determination of all on board that she should not fall into the hands of the enemy if it could be helped."

There being now a fair prospect of saving the Eastport, Porter returned on the 19th to Grand Ecore. The army was about to retreat, and the larger gunboats were ordered to proceed with the transports slowly to Alexandria, or as near that point as the water at the falls would permit, following the rear of the army. The admiral retained three of the vessels of lighter draft as a rear-guard to bring off the Eastport. This disposition was made so that as few vessels as possible should be subjected to the risks of navigation, and also that the more powerful gunboats should be near the falls to take advantage of any sudden rise that would enable them to pass that critical point. The next day the fleet and the transports set out according to the prearranged order, the admiral in the Cricket bringing up the extreme rear. Arriving at the Eastport, he found her still resting slightly on the bottom, but succeeded in getting up steam on her. Being one of the most valuable ships in the squad-

ron, Porter determined to run some risk to get her through. Both with him and with Phelps it was not only a matter of concern, but of pride, that the Eastport should be carried safely to Alexandria. The gunboat had been captured by Phelps in the first year of the war, and after her repair had been commanded by him during her operations on the Western rivers ever since; and the two officers showed a dogged resolution in their efforts to save the vessel in the face of overwhelming difficulties. Porter knew that he was undergoing great personal danger, and that his rear-guard would be exposed to attack after the departure of the army. All the time he had before him, in addition, the possibility that none of the gunboats would be able to get over the falls. Of the retreat Porter afterward said: "Mentally, I never went through so much anxiety in my life." Nevertheless, he did not propose to lose a vessel if he could help it, and his first consideration was to save the Eastport.

On the 21st the Eastport was at last floated and was started in tow of the pump-boat Champion No. 5, the pump of the other boat, Champion No. 3, being transferred to the gunboat and connected with her boilers. This arrangement, with the addition of one or two siphon-pumps, kept the water out of the fire-room and confined it to the bow. For the next five days, from April 21st to 26th, the Eastport continued on her precarious voyage. The admiral remained all the time in company with her. The rear-guard consisted of three light-drafts, the Fort Hindman, Juliet, and Cricket, the last bearing Porter's flag, the disabled Eastport, and the two pump-boats. The Cricket towed a flatboat with the Eastport's guns.

On the first day the Eastport made twenty miles down the stream, but at six o'clock in the evening she grounded, and the remaining days were almost wholly spent in

getting her over the bars and other obstructions which abounded in the river. "It would be impossible," said Porter, "to give an adequate idea of the difficulties of the navigation." During this time the vessel grounded eight times badly, and each time under circumstances where it was very doubtful if she would come off. Both the admiral and Phelps worked with almost superhuman efforts to accomplish their object, and their spirit communicating itself to all the others, the whole force was ready to undergo any kind of hardship and privation, losing sleep, removing obstacles under the fire of the enemy, and constantly working to save the vessel with an eagerness and enthusiasm that knew no bounds.

"On the sixth day of this labor of hauling the Eastport over the bars," says Porter, "and after congratulating ourselves that we had passed every impediment, orders were given to fill up with fence rails for fuel, and we started down-stream with the expectation of making at least thirty miles that day. The vessel had already been brought sixty miles on her way, and sixty more would bring her within our lines. The army, though, were sixty miles ahead of us, and the report was that the rebels were following in their rear, also opposing them in front, and we might naturally expect when the army arrived safely in Alexandria that the whole power of the enemy would be directed to cutting off my small force of three light-drafts, and the Eastport without any guns; indeed, we had already received notice that such were their intentions."

This was the situation, when, on the morning of April 25th, the rear-guard having then reached Montgomery, the admiral signaled to pass down the stream. Scarcely had the vessels started before the Eastport was again hard aground. This time her position was such that it

seemed hardly possible to relieve her. The bed of the river was filled with logs, and the gunboat was in a pocket where there was almost no water under her. Time pressed, for the enemy were approaching. Attempts were made to lighten her by removing her iron plating, but this was of necessity abandoned, for it took too much time to work off the plates. The other boats spent hours in their efforts to get the Eastport off. Finally, after laboring all day and all night, the Fort Hindman, "whose commander," says Porter, "has worked to save the Eastport with a zeal I never saw surpassed," succeeded with the steam-capstan in moving her bow, but only enough to get her in a worse position directly across the channel with a bed of logs under her, from which it was clear that no human power could move her; and Phelps at last admitted that there was no hope.

The enemy, who had hitherto confined themselves to desultory attacks, now arrived at Montgomery, and at nine o'clock fire was opened by sharpshooters from the south bank, where Porter's men were exposed in all directions working on the Eastport. These were the advance-guard of a large force under Colonel Likens and Colonel Harrison. Another force from General Liddell's command cooperated from the opposite bank, and during the whole morning the squadron was subject to their annoying fire.<sup>1</sup>

Twice before the admiral had given Phelps orders to prepare for the destruction of the Eastport, thinking that her time had come, and each time the order had been revoked. Now, however, there was no help for it, and the final preparations were made. A ton of powder was distributed at various points on board, and she was filled with such combustibles as could be procured; and at a

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor's report of April 27th, War Records, Army, xxxiv, I, 583.

quarter before two on the afternoon of the 26th of April Phelps applied the match and was the last man to leave the vessel. He had barely time to reach his boat, when the Eastport blew up, covering him with fragments. Seven explosions followed, and then the flames burst forth in every direction. The vessel was completely destroyed, "as perfect a wreck," says Porter, "as ever was made by powder."

At the moment of the explosion the Cricket was lying tied to the bank, and the admiral was backing out from the Eastport in the Hindman, "to give the former," as he says, "a chance to blow up without injury to any one." Just at this moment the main body of the force under Likens and Harrison arrived and made a vigorous attack with small arms. At the same time they made a rush to board the Cricket. The tinclad, however, dropping out from the bank, opened on them with grape and canister, and upon receiving a heavy cross-fire from the Juliet and the Fort Hindman the Confederates shortly retreated with a loss of two killed and four wounded.<sup>1</sup> The little squadron, now composed of the Cricket, Juliet, Hindman, and the two pump-boats, proceeded more rapidly down the river.

Twenty miles below, at the mouth of the Cane River, a much more formidable force of the Confederates under Lieutenant-Colonel Caudle had been posted in a strong position with two hundred sharpshooters and Cornay's battery of 12-pounders. According to Maitland, the pilot of the Champion, who was afterward captured, the force also included a part of Nims's battery which the Confederates had captured at Sabine Cross-roads, and

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<sup>1</sup> Porter's report, April 28th ; report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1864, 526 ; Taylor's report, April 27th, War Records, Army, xxxiv, 1, 583.

numbered in all eighteen guns.<sup>1</sup> The gunboats were in close order and ready for action, the Cricket leading with the admiral on board, followed by the pump-boat, Champion No. 3, then the Juliet with the other pump-boat, Champion No. 5, lashed alongside, and last of all the Fort Hindman.

On rounding the point the Cricket discovered the presence of the enemy's artillery on the right bank, and immediately opened fire from her bow-guns. The enemy returned the fire, disclosing the strength of their position. As the Cricket was a perfectly vulnerable tin-clad, armed only with six howitzers and entirely unprotected from the enemy's artillery fire, she was in a critical situation, and her captain, Gorringe, stopped the engines; but Porter immediately ordered full speed ahead, being determined to run the battery as his only chance. It was a situation where a pause was fatal. The little gunboat was an easy target for the artillery on the bank. The admiral took charge of the vessel himself. "The fire," he says, "was the heaviest I ever witnessed."

The Cricket was now under a pelting stream of shot and shell, and every shot passed through and through her. The admiral, finding that his guns were not firing rapidly, rushed to the gun-deck to see what was the matter. As he stepped down, the after-gun was struck by a shell and disabled, and every man at the gun killed or wounded. At the same moment the crew at the forward gun was swept away by an exploding shell. Porter instantly made up a gun's crew from the contrabands, who fought the gun to the last moment. At this instant it became evident that something was wrong with the engines. All the men in the fire-room had been wound-

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Secretary of the Navy for 1864, p. 541; Maitland's report.

ed, leaving only one man to fire up. Porter left the gun-deck and hurried to the engine-room. He found the chief engineer standing at his post dead with his hand on the lever. Replacing him by an assistant, Porter rushed up to the pilot-house. Just as he reached it a shot passed through it, wounding the pilot. Porter then took the wheel himself. In this condition he passed the battery. Arriving below, he attempted to turn the vessel's head upstream to renew the attack with the two bow-guns, the only ones that were not disabled. Finding that he could not accomplish this, he drifted around the point and shelled the enemy's batteries in the rear. In five minutes the Cricket had been struck thirty-eight times with shot and shell, and had lost half of her officers and crew. Although she could make little reply to the enemy's fire, the commander of their battery, Cornay, was killed in the action.

In the meantime the other vessels had met with varied disasters. The pump-boat, Champion No. 3, following the Cricket, received a shot in her boiler, which exploded, scalding nearly her entire working crew composed of some two hundred negroes. While the Cricket was making her perilous attempt, the captains of the other vessels had decided that it would be better not to pass the batteries, but the Juliet and the Champion No. 5, the former having her steam-pipe cut, drifted close in to the bank under the bluff on which the enemy were posted, where their guns could not be depressed to reach them. Under cover of the fire of the Hindman from above and the Cricket from below, the Champion now towed the Juliet up the river out of range, where she was joined by the Hindman, and the three vessels spent the night in making repairs.

Meantime the Cricket, filled with dead and wounded,



started down the river to get assistance at a point four miles below, where Porter had ordered two ironclads to be ready to meet him in case of emergency. She had proceeded but a short distance when she ran aground, still within reach of the enemy's guns, but fortunately out of sight, and it was three hours before she could get off. Finally Porter reached the Neosho and sent her up to cover the passage.

The Juliet and her consorts, however, did not wait for assistance. The Hindman had a rather powerful battery of six 8-inch guns, and Phelps, having this advantage, determined to make a rush for it, and repeat, if possible, the success of the Cricket. He only waited until he could partially repair the Juliet. The Hindman then took the lead with the Juliet in tow, followed by the pump-boat, the latter under the command of Pilot William Maitland, who had volunteered to carry her through. The pump-boat was disabled and set on fire, the pilot in charge of her being covered with wounds from bursting shells. Nevertheless, he stuck to his post and ran her as close as he could to the opposite bank, where the rest of the crew, including the pilot, swam ashore, and were taken prisoners. The Hindman had her wheel-ropes cut away and drifted past, turning round and round. Both the vessels were badly cut up, the Juliet losing fifteen in killed and wounded. Drifting down a few miles, they met the Neosho coming up too late to cover them.

The admiral had now, on the 27th of April, with the last of the rear-guard, joined the main body of the squadron above the Falls of Alexandria, which yet remained to be passed. So far he had lost only one gunboat, the Eastport, blown up by a torpedo, and the two pump-boats which had been destroyed in the fight at Cane River. The loss of these was due to the inevitable incidents of

war. With these exceptions the squadron was still intact, but it was now threatened with a more serious danger.

The "Falls of Alexandria," so called, consisted of a series of rapids about a mile in length a short distance above the city. The river here was filled with ragged rocks, among which it was impossible to find a channel. At the time of Porter's arrival, on the 27th of April, the water was not more than four feet in depth. At least seven or eight feet would be necessary to float his largest vessels, and even then the passage would be full of danger.

The vessels assembled above the falls included some of the best of the squadron. Of the survivors of the original fleet of Eads gunboats which had become so famous from their incessant and successful operations in the Mississippi, all four were there, the Louisville, Carondelet, Mound City, and Pittsburg. There were also the ironclad Chillicothe, and the three river monitors, Osage, Ozark, and Neosho, with the wooden gunboat Lexington, which had formed the first nucleus of the Mississippi flotilla. Besides these, there were many transports, tugs, and light-drafts, most of which, however, could get over with little difficulty; nor was their injury or loss so serious a matter. Not so with the ironclads. The latter still constituted the main strength of the naval force in the Western rivers, and their destruction would mean an irreparable loss.

To leave the vessels in their position after the army had departed would virtually be to hand them over to the enemy. No efforts would have been too great on their part to secure such a prize as the light ironclads of the Mississippi squadron, penned up in a narrow river, without freedom of movement or ability to preserve their

communications; and after the retreat of the army their destruction would be only a question of time. A surrender was of course not to be thought of. Porter had urged the department nearly a week before to see to it that the army remained long enough for the gunboats to escape. He said:

It would be hard indeed, after cooperating with the army, and the navy performing successfully all that was required of it, to be left in a position where we would have to surrender or blow up. I will promise you the latter.

By one of those accidents of fate which seem nothing less than miraculous, and which upon this and other occasions gave some ground for ascribing to Porter more than an ordinary share of good fortune, a man, and perhaps the only man in the country—certainly the only man in the military or naval service—who was equal to the accomplishment of the task of saving the squadron, appeared at this moment to accomplish it.

On the staff of the Nineteenth Corps was an engineer officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Bailey, a man who had had no education in military engineering or any other branch of military science, but who was, nevertheless, destined to work out one of the most difficult problems ever presented to a military engineer, and to work it out in a manner which was a lesson to the engineers of the world for all time. Bailey had been an engineer in Wisconsin, and had had experience in the floating of log booms down rivers of variable depth. His suggestion on this occasion was simply the employment on a large scale of the devices which he had previously used in similar but less important situations. Briefly, he proposed to dam the water above the falls, leaving a narrow opening in the middle, and float the vessels through on the temporary river thus created.

It was a simple idea, but a daring one, and was variously received by the officers of the expedition. Some of them ridiculed it. Others thought it might be worth trying, and recommended its adoption. General Hunter, who was consulted, had little confidence in its feasibility. General Franklin, on the other hand, thoroughly approved of it. The admiral felt that it gave slender promise of success. Nevertheless, he did not give way to discouragement. His first jesting comment was that "if damning would do any good, we would soon have the ships afloat." But apart from jesting, the fleet was in the position of a drowning man, ready to catch at any straw, and in Bailey's project was their only hope of salvation. In any case, the army, and the army alone, could carry it out, as it was an engineering feat entirely beyond the resources of the squadron.

As often happened during the war, whenever any particular branch of mechanical work was to be done, the particular mechanics could be found to do it among the rank and file of the troops. On this occasion a Maine regiment of lumbermen was immediately pressed into the service and was soon engaged in felling and hauling trees by the wholesale for the proposed structure. Its labors were supplemented by picked details from Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and other Western troops, and by two regiments of colored infantry. Without this immense force of specially adapted men the work would have been impossible, for the labor involved was enormous. Bailey had also the efficient cooperation of Colonel James Grant Wilson, of General Banks's staff, who was specially charged with assisting him in carrying out the undertaking.

The admiral, who thirty-six hours before had been carrying his little flag-ship, the Cricket, through her pas-

sage of fire and blood at Cane River, was now seconding, so far as his small force of men permitted, the efforts of the army. A detail was made up from the crews to assist in the work, under Captain Langthorne of the Mound City, an energetic volunteer officer. Two days after the fleet arrived at the falls, the preparations were fully under way. All the neighboring mills were torn down for material. Thousands of trees were felled with the utmost promptness. Teams were moving in all directions bringing in broken stone. Quarries were opened, flatboats were hastily knocked together to bring down stone from above, and the feverish energy of Bailey was caught up by every officer and man in the army. The time was limited, for the army was short of provisions, and in a few days would be compelled to move.

The rapids consisted of two separate falls, the upper and the lower, with a considerable space of deeper water between them. Bailey's plan was to erect his dam at the shallowest point of the lower falls, thereby raising the water not only on these falls, but on the falls above, which were less difficult of navigation. When all the vessels had passed the upper falls and come down on the pent-up waters just above the dam, the plan was to pass them through the opening upon the escaping flood, which it was thought would be sufficient to carry them over the short lower stretch of rocky rapids. Of course such a plan required the utmost nicety in the management of the sluiceway, as well as of the imprisoned vessels, to make it a success.

The construction of the great dam was begun at once. The river at this point was seven hundred and fifty feet wide. The work was started by running out from the north bank of the river, where the land was well wooded,

a tree dam made of the bodies of very large trees, cross-tied with heavy timber and filled in with brush, brick, stone, and other material collected from buildings far and near, and strengthened in every way that ingenuity could devise. This dam ran out three hundred feet toward the middle of the river. Directly opposite, from the south bank, where timber was scarce, cribs filled with stone were built out also for three hundred feet. The space between the two dams in the middle of the river formed the gateway or sluice through which the vessels were to pass, and this was partially closed by filling four coal-barges with brick and sinking them in the river. Between the barges were openings twenty feet wide, through which the banked-up waters passed. The co-operation of thousands of willing hands accomplished the work successfully, in spite of the nine-mile current which threatened to sweep everything before it.

The admiral carefully prepared his vessels and instructed their captains in the steps to be taken to secure a successful passage when the time should arrive. The stores, batteries, cables, anchors, and other heavy weights on the gunboats were removed and carried by land below the Falls of Alexandria; for whatever might be the rise in the water Porter knew well that there would be little to spare. He resolved to take no chances, and lightened the gunboats in every way possible. He even went so far as to destroy eleven old 32-pounders which there was no time to haul down. He also stripped the iron plating from the sides of the Eads gunboats and from the Ozark, and as he could not save the iron he sent the gunboats up the river at night to a point where they could find five fathoms of water, where the iron was thrown overboard to be swallowed up in the quicksands. In his first report of the operations he omitted all reference to this matter



for greater prudence, but later he reported it, stating that the Eads gunboats ran so much better without the iron that he did not propose to replace it.

As the work progressed during the first eight days of May, the army and the navy watched with eager and excited interest the gradual rise of the water above the dam. On the 8th the dam had nearly reached completion, and Porter ordered down two of the lighter iron-clads, the Osage and Neosho, with the Fort Hindman, to try the passage of the upper falls. This was accomplished without mishap, and they were stationed close to the dam, to be ready to pass it at the critical moment. In another day the water would be high enough to float the others over the upper falls, and the same plan was to be followed with them. As soon as they arrived near the dam and the water had risen sufficiently, all the vessels would make a run for it through the opening.

An accident, however, happened that upset all these calculations. On the morning of the 9th the pressure of the water above the dam became so great that it swept away two of the sunken barges that lay in mid-stream in the gateway. The barges swung around with the current, forming a cushion upon the lower side of the opening. In a moment it seemed that the whole work of the past week was to be lost. Instantly Porter mounted a horse and rode up the river-bank to the point where the upper vessels were anchored. He determined that something should go through, and gave orders to Bache, the captain of the Lexington, to try the passage of the upper falls, and, if successful in that, to make a dash through the dam. The Lexington was selected for this forlorn hope partly because of the tried steadiness of her commander and partly because she was the least important



of the gunboats; and no man could know how the experiment would result.

The Lexington instantly obeyed the admiral's order and succeeded in getting over the upper falls just in time, the water falling rapidly as she passed over. She then steered directly for the opening in the dam, through which a torrent was rushing so furiously that it seemed as if certain destruction awaited her. "Thousands of beating hearts," said Porter, "looked on anxiously for the result. The silence was so great, as the Lexington approached the dam, that a pin might almost be heard to fall. She entered the gap with a full head of steam on, pitched down the roaring torrent, made two or three spasmodic rolls, hung for a moment on the rocks below, was then swept into deep water by the current, and rounded to safely into the bank. Thirty thousand voices rose in one deafening cheer, and universal joy seemed to pervade the face of every man present."

The admiral now ordered the three vessels which had gone down to the dam the day before to follow the Lexington. First came the Neosho. All her hatches were battened down and every precaution taken against accident. She did not fare as well as her consort. Her pilot was demoralized as he approached the abyss and stopped her engines, notwithstanding Porter's emphatic orders to carry a full head of steam. The result was that for a moment her hull disappeared from sight under the water, and every one thought she was lost. Presently, however, she arose, swept along over the rocks by the current, and entered the deep water, having got through with no other casualty than a hole in her bottom, which a few hours' work was sufficient to repair. After her came the Fort Hindman and Osage, both of which went through beautifully without touching. This made up the sum of the

first results accomplished by the dam, and it had assured the safety of four out of the ten imprisoned gunboats.

There still remained above the upper falls the Carondelet, Louisville, Mound City, Pittsburg, and Chillicothe, and the monitor Ozark. The dam was now broken, and the water on the upper falls had fallen to such a point that it would have been madness for the six heavy ironclads to attempt the passage. Neither Porter nor Bailey, however, was disheartened. On the contrary, the success in getting through four of the vessels impelled them to renewed exertions and stimulated the soldiers, who were working to carry out their plans.

The time was now so short and the force of the current so heavy that Bailey decided that he would not repeat the attempt to run the dam entirely across the river. The barges that had been swung out from the gap, now sixty feet wide, were left as a cushion or fender for the passing vessels, which would keep them clear of the rocks at the side. To deepen the water at the principal falls was now the main problem. To accomplish this Bailey built two short wing dams, each one running from the side and only partially obstructing the current. These dams pointed slightly down the stream, and by taking the volume of water at the side and directing it into mid-stream, made a narrow and somewhat tortuous channel with several inches of additional depth.

On the 10th the Chillicothe managed to work her way through the upper falls. The Carondelet attempted to follow, but owing to the rapidity of the current and the position of the wing dams she was forced aside, and lay with her stern pointing diagonally across the channel. Several attempts were made to haul her from this position, all of which failed. The Mound City was ordered to try the passage, and grounded abreast of the

Carondelet. On the 11th Colonel Pearsall, who was assisting Colonel Bailey, proposed to build a bracket dam made with planking upon trestles below the wing dam on the north side. This was done, and gave an additional foot of water under the Mound City and Carondelet. Both vessels floated off, and thereafter the three remaining vessels followed their consorts. All were now in position to pass the main dam.

On the 12th the first three of the gunboats took the passage in succession. All had their hatches battened down, and all were handled with judgment and skill. They passed through with no accident except the unshipping of their rudders. On the following morning, the 13th, at ten o'clock, the three remaining vessels, the Louisville, Chillicothe, and Ozark, also passed smoothly through the gap amid the cheering of the troops. By three o'clock in the afternoon the vessels had coaled, their guns and ammunition were replaced, and all steamed down the river with their convoy of transports.

At Alexandria the Black Hawk and the other vessels were picked up, all except the Covington and Signal, which had been lost after a most gallant and spirited resistance to an attack of the enemy in great force at Dunn's Bayou while the ironclads were waiting for the completion of the dam. No further difficulties were experienced in the descent of the river, and on the 21st of May the squadron reached the Mississippi. As usual, Porter gave full credit to those who had helped him. Of Bailey, he says in his report:

Words are inadequate to express the admiration I feel for the abilities of Lieutenant-Colonel Bailey. This is without doubt the best engineering feat ever performed. Under the best circumstances a private company would not have completed this work under one year, and to an ordinary mind

the whole thing would have appeared an utter impossibility. Leaving out his abilities as an engineer, the credit he has conferred upon the country, he has saved to the Union a valuable fleet worth nearly two million dollars. More, he has deprived the enemy of a triumph which would have emboldened them to carry on this war a year or two longer, for the intended departure of the army was a fixed fact, and there was nothing left for me to do in case that event occurred but to destroy every part of the vessels so that the rebels could make nothing of them. The highest honors the Government can bestow on Colonel Bailey can never repay him for the service he has rendered the country.

The admiral's generous praise was reciprocated by Bailey. In his report of May 17th he says:

Admiral Porter furnished a detail from his ship's crews under command of an excellent officer, Captain Langthorne of the Mound City. All his officers and men were constantly present, and to their extraordinary exertions and to the well-known energy and ability of the admiral, much of the success of the undertaking is due.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the history of the wonderful escape of the gunboats from the Red River, an event the like of which probably never occurred before or since. The honor of devising the scheme by which they were extricated belongs wholly to Colonel Bailey, and the work was done by the army, but the success with which the retreat to Alexandria was carried out was due to the tenacity, skill in preparation, and indomitable energy of the admiral himself. No episode in Porter's career is more remarkable than that of the Red River expedition, and none shows more clearly his marvelous qualities of leadership. His courage and hopefulness were the courage and hopefulness of the squadron. To every man under

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, xxxiv, 1, 404.

him, whether officer or seaman, he communicated his own buoyancy of spirit, his untiring energy, his obstinate courage in coping with circumstances as adverse as ever it fell to the lot of a naval commander to meet.

The Red River expedition turned out a colossal failure, but its failure was not in any way Porter's fault. The work devolving upon the squadron on the way up was not arduous, and, as far as it went, was well performed. The catastrophe came with the sudden retreat of Banks after the victory of his own troops at Pleasant Hill, when he had an opportunity—and no general could ask for a better one—to fall upon Shreveport and accomplish the objects of the expedition. At the moment when he had success within his grasp he abandoned the expedition and retreated so precipitately as to leave the gunboats and transports exposed on their way to Grand Ecore; and it was in no way due to him that Green's attack at Blair's Landing was so gallantly repulsed. On the second stage of the retreat, from Grand Ecore to Alexandria, the rear-guard of the fleet was again left in the lurch. But for this Banks was not perhaps so much to blame, although he might easily have made such disposition of his troops as to have prevented the terrible ordeal to which the rear-guard was subjected by Cornay's attack at Cane River, a battle which was only saved from overwhelming disaster by the courage and energy of the admiral. In the final operation by which the fleet was rescued, the erection of Bailey's dam, General Banks gave the fullest support and cooperation. "On both sides," says Colonel Irwin, "this unhappy campaign of the Red River raised a great and bitter crop of quarrels. Taylor was relieved by Kirby Smith as the result of an angry correspondence; Banks was overslaughed, and Franklin quitted the department in disgust; A. J. Smith

departed more in anger than in sorrow; while between the admiral and the general commanding, recriminations were exchanged in language well up to the limits of parliamentary privilege."

The admiral's comments on Banks were in some respects unwarranted, but on the question of military inefficiency his criticisms were just. As a result of the campaign, Banks was virtually deprived of his command, while the country learned to recognize in Porter a leader as great in defeat as in victory.

## CHAPTER XIV

### FORT FISHER

IN the summer and autumn of 1864 the Government was making strenuous efforts to extinguish the commerce of the Confederates by seizing the Southern ports and converting the blockade into an occupation. The capture of Mobile sealed the last port in the Gulf, and the South Atlantic squadron had moved in so close to Savannah and Charleston that blockade-running at those points had well-nigh ceased. Wilmington still remained a favorite harbor for the blockade-runners, and to this point their voyages, whether from Halifax, Bermuda, Nassau, or Liverpool, were now chiefly directed. It afforded peculiar facilities to the blockade-runners and peculiar difficulties to the blockaders. The town was on Cape Fear River about thirty miles from its mouth. There were two entrances to the river, one from the eastward called New Inlet, the other from the southward at the river mouth. The entrances were not more than six miles apart in a straight line, but between the two lay Smith's Island, a long stretch of sand, with Cape Fear projecting from its southern extremity, and a line of shoals extending out ten miles farther, making the distance by sea between the two entrances nearly forty miles. Each of the entrances was protected by strong works, New Inlet by Fort Fisher, and the western bar channel on the other side of Smith's Island by Fort Caswell.



Notwithstanding all the vigilance and alertness of the blockading vessels, it seemed impossible to prevent the entry at Wilmington of the small, swift, light-draft blockade-runners built specially for the purpose. The supplies which they brought from abroad were indispensable to the support of the Confederate armies. As the only seaport of which the Confederates retained effective control, Wilmington was their only channel of communication with the outside world, the only point from which they could send out a cruiser, or ship the cotton, which was their last remaining source of revenue, as well as of foreign credit. Except the actual crushing of the Army of Northern Virginia, the conquest of Wilmington was obviously the most vital blow that could now be struck at the Confederates. Its fall meant almost to a certainty the speedy end of the war. In fact, General Lee had sent word to the commanding officer at Wilmington that the port must be held or he could not subsist his troops.

For these reasons the Navy Department had been for some time urging a combined movement of the army and navy for the reduction of Fort Fisher, the principal defense of Wilmington and the strongest fortification in the Confederacy. In May, 1864, an attack had been suggested by Colonel James Jourdan, commanding the subdistrict of Beaufort, N. C., but neither the army nor the navy was prepared for it at the time. Later in the summer General Grant assented to the project, and the time was fixed for the 1st of October. It was recognized that the undertaking of silencing the fort by the guns of the navy was one of stupendous magnitude, and vessels were withdrawn from all quarters to reenforce the North Atlantic squadron for the purpose. These were gradually assembled, beginning in September, at Hampton

Roads, but still the army was unable or its head was unwilling to afford its promised cooperation. On the 28th of October the Secretary of the Navy wrote a most urgent letter to the President, calling attention to the preparations which had been made and to the delays of the army, and urging in no measured terms the necessity of immediate action. This was all the more important, as Fort Fisher lay on the open seaboard and an attacking fleet would be exposed during the operation to the full force of the Atlantic gales upon a coast notoriously dangerous in winter. The delays, however, continued, with the result that the operation could not be carried out until December and January, months in which up to that time no seaman had deemed it possible that a fleet of vessels could safely lie between Cape Hatteras and Cape Fear.

The department at first designated Farragut to command the expedition. It was fitting that this undertaking, the most important remaining to be performed by the navy, should be assigned to him as its senior officer. There was nothing now left to be done in the Gulf, and owing to the great size of the attacking force and to the fact that it would include many heavy ships, a large number of the older commodores and captains would take part in it, and would perhaps serve under Farragut, who had always been their senior, with less friction than under any other commander-in-chief. Farragut was now, however, physically worn out and in great need of rest, and therefore declined the command. The department then selected Porter, a selection plainly based solely on grounds of fitness for the service. On September 22d an order was sent to Porter to turn over the command of the Mississippi squadron temporarily to Captain Pennock and to relieve Admiral Lee at Beaufort in command of

the North Atlantic Blockading squadron. Porter was permitted to take with him his personal staff and five other officers whom he might select from his squadron. He accordingly retained Breese, who was to be his chief of staff in his new command, and selected among the others to go with him Ramsay, Walker, Selfridge, Bache, and Pritchett. The admiral lost no time in carrying out the order, and arrived in Washington on the 6th of October, exactly two years after he had left the capital to take command of the Mississippi squadron. Here he remained only one day to acquaint himself with the plans of the department, and on the 7th sailed in the *Baltimore* for Hampton Roads, where he assumed command of the squadron on the morning of October 12th.

Although Porter had been specially selected for the expedition against Fort Fisher, his new command devolved upon him extensive duties entirely apart from the expedition. It was at this time by far the most important of all the naval stations. Its headquarters were at Beaufort or at Hampton Roads, as occasion required. It included several distinct centers of operation. First came the Lower Chesapeake, comprising the York and Rappahannock Rivers—all, in short, south of the lines of the Potomac flotilla, which was a separate command. Next it embraced the entrance to the Chesapeake, Hampton Roads, the naval station at Norfolk, and the whole line of operations on the James River. Hampton Roads was at this time the active center of all movements afloat on the Atlantic coast; while the valley of the James was the theater of the operations of the Army of the Potomac on the north bank and the Army of the James on the south bank, the latter under the immediate command of General Butler, but the whole directed in person by General Grant in chief command, at this time preparing for the

final campaign which was to result in the fall of Richmond. The river was the indispensable base of supplies and channel of communication for these armies. At City Point was Grant's enormous depot of stores and his fleet of transports, and the control of the river to be maintained by this division of the squadron extended as far up as Trent's Reach, a few miles below Richmond, where a line of obstructions had been placed to prevent the descent of the formidable fleet of Confederate iron-clads guarding the upper river. This fleet comprised the casemated vessels Richmond, Virginia, and Fredericksburg, together with several gunboats, and was commanded by Mitchell, who had been Porter's opponent after the passage of the fleet at New Orleans.

An equally active center of operations, though less intimately connected with the grand strategy of the land campaign, was in the Sounds of North Carolina, which were held by a squadron, under Captain Macomb, principally composed of double-enders. Here, as everywhere else, the Confederates had been active in constructing efficient rams and armored gunboats, and only a few months before one of these, the Albemarle, had descended the Roanoke, and, engaging the Union forces on more than one occasion, had enabled the enemy to recapture Plymouth. At this point she still remained, a constant menace to National control of the Sounds.

Finally, there was still a fourth center of operations of the squadron, or rather two distinct centers, in the blockade of Wilmington, at the eastern and western entrances. Here the service called for the most ceaseless vigilance and the closest and most constant supervision. It was a service that told heavily upon officers and men, and only by close attention and constant pressure on the part of the commander-in-chief could the natural effects

of exhaustion upon those engaged in it be counteracted. With each successful attempt at evasion by the blockade-runners new measures must be thought out and adopted to render the blockade more efficient, and, if possible, effectually to close the port.

The admiral would have found quite enough to occupy him in the duties of his new command without any expedition to Fort Fisher. The force as turned over to him comprised one hundred vessels, and during the next few weeks was gradually increased to over one hundred and fifty, and included the largest types of ironclads and wooden frigates in the navy. His first care was to organize the force of unarmored ships available for active operations in four divisions, commanded respectively by Commodore Thatcher, Commodore Lanman, Commodore Godon, and Captain Melancton Smith; while the division of ironclads was commanded by Commodore Radford. For his flag-ship Porter retained the *Malvern*, a captured blockade-runner of moderate size but of great speed, which exactly answered the purpose of enabling him to move to any point with the utmost rapidity.

The Sounds of North Carolina required his immediate attention. Upon the tributary rivers were many important strategic points, New Berne, Plymouth, Washington, Weldon, and Winton. The recovery of Plymouth, which had already been captured and recaptured, was the most urgent matter in hand. When he assumed command, the picket-boats to be used by Cushing in his projected torpedo attack on the ram *Albemarle* were about to arrive from the North. One of them presently came with Cushing on board, but the other two were missing. Porter made every effort to learn their whereabouts, but as they did not turn up, he sent Cushing on the expedition with a single launch. Maccomb was given

precise instructions by the admiral, in case the ram moved down against his squadron, as to the best mode of attacking her. Porter, above all, enjoined upon him that he must not hesitate to risk his vessels, and must destroy her at any cost. He said: "Even if half your vessels are sunk, you must pursue this course." The Albemarle, however, did not come down. Cushing succeeded in his gallant attempt on the 27th of October, and on the 31st Maccomb was able to report the recapture of Plymouth. This operation was followed by a joint expedition up the Roanoke to Rainbow Bluff.

The patrol of the James River and Hampton Roads and the maintenance of the communications were of still more pressing importance. This service the admiral could direct from Hampton Roads, occasionally ascending the river to the obstructions at Trent's Reach, or to Aiken's Landing just below, to inform himself more fully of the situation. At Hampton Roads also there was much to be done in regulating the movements of vessels and in providing for the refitting and repair of those which were constantly arriving for the purpose from the stations above or below, as well as the immediate preparation of the daily additions to the fleet. The officer in command at the advance post in the James River under Porter's instructions made a most thorough examination of the movements of the enemy's vessels above, and expressing some anxiety at the possible result of an attack by the rams, Porter instructed him: "As to rams and torpedoes, they can all be avoided by proper care. Board the rams and keep out torpedo-catchers. It will serve to keep the watches on the alert and the picket-boats lively." Later he said to the same officer: "If an opportunity occurs, and men are to be found for desperate enterprises, endeavor to have the



rebel rams destroyed. The loss of a picket is nothing in comparison to the destruction of an enemy's vessel."<sup>1</sup>

On the same day he wrote to Fox, referring to the James River: "Our fellows have all got the ram fever up there and write doleful letters. I tell them I am glad the rams are going to be let loose; it will put some life into them."

As a result of careful study of the demands of the blockade, General Order No. 18 was issued on October 22d, giving minute directions for its efficient maintenance. Three lines of blockaders were established, an inner line close to the bar, and an outer line of fast vessels for chasing; while still a third line was placed at a greater distance from the shore to capture vessels waiting for an opportunity to run in after dark or outgoing vessels which had eluded the inner lines. While giving these directions Porter stated with characteristic freedom:

The following instructions . . . must be observed as nearly as possible, except in cases where there is a chance of losing a vessel by too close adherence to orders. While it is desirable to observe some system in blockading, still there are times when officers must deviate from their orders to insure success; and when success follows or the officer shows the necessity of deviating from general orders, I will approve.

Under these instructions, modified from time to time as the occasion required, the blockade of Wilmington became marvelously efficient; in fact, it was probably the most efficient blockade ever maintained.

The direction of the affairs of the squadron took Porter frequently up the James River, where, as well as at Hampton Roads, he had interviews from time to time with General Grant, General Butler, and Assistant Sec-

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, Navy, xi, p. 76.



retary Fox in reference to the proposed expedition. He was much disappointed to find General Grant disinclined to immediate action. He felt that his intimate relations with the general at Vicksburg entitled him to special consideration, and after all, the Fort Fisher expedition as projected by the Navy Department was the real purpose of his coming East. But General Grant, as lieutenant-general commanding the armies of the United States in the final campaign in Virginia, was somewhat differently placed from General Grant commanding the Army of the Tennessee at the siege of Vicksburg. While he doubtless had no disposition to belittle the importance of the project with which Porter was now concerned, yet other considerations seemed to him paramount for the moment, and when Grant was engaged in pursuing a main line of action he offered the most stubborn resistance to any attempt to divert him to what he considered side issues. Perhaps that was no more his character in Virginia than it had been on the Mississippi, but the effect of discouraging delays and repeated postponements was exceedingly nettling to a man in Porter's position, and patience was not one of his principal virtues. It was not a mere question of loss of time, but the possible loss of opportunity, for the winter season was coming on when the risks of the proposed expedition would be enormously increased, as Porter well knew. Still the month of October and the first weeks of November slipped by and nothing was done; nor did there seem to be any immediate prospect of a change in the situation.

It was about the middle of November that General Butler, then commanding the Army of the James, originated his suggestion of operating against Fort Fisher by exploding an immense quantity of powder upon a vessel placed close to the beach. The plan was first

proposed to Fox, who adopted it with considerable eagerness. Engineers of the army and ordnance officers of both services were consulted, and, while General Delafield, the chief of engineers, in a very able and exhaustive report condemned the project *in toto* as being absolutely ineffectual, other officers were found at the bureaus who gave the scheme some support and encouragement. Porter at first made light of it, but finding that General Butler had it much at heart, he adopted it in the belief that in this way he could secure what he had hitherto failed to accomplish—a sufficient interest in the expedition on the part of the military authorities to bring about their cooperation with a force of troops.

The result was as Porter had anticipated. No sooner was the project of the powder-boat adopted, toward the latter part of November, than plans were matured for detaching a force from the Army of the James to take part in the expedition. The force was to consist of five thousand men and was to be commanded by General Weitzel. An old and worthless steamer, the *Louisiana*, was selected to carry the powder, of which three hundred tons were put on board, and ordnance officers were sent down from the bureaus at Washington to arrange for its proper stowage, and for the disposition of the fuses and clock-work by which it was to be fired. As often happens with a man of Porter's temperament, he threw himself into the powder-boat project with as much zeal as if he had originally approved it, and finally, in his sanguine way, brought himself to the belief that it might accomplish much more important results than he had imagined.

The expedition was arranged to start during the second week of December. Porter had no liking for General Butler and no confidence in his military capacity, and he was emphatically opposed to his having charge of

the land attack, as General Grant well understood. It is but just to Grant to say that it was not his intention that General Butler should be in command. "It was never contemplated," says Grant in his indorsement of January 7, 1865, "that General Butler should accompany the expedition, but Major-General G. Weitzel was specially named as the commander of it." Nevertheless, General Butler, to whose command Weitzel and his troops belonged, decided to go, and Porter for a long time was under the erroneous supposition that Grant had sent him.

The long peninsula on which Fort Fisher is situated, known as Federal Point, extends nearly north and south, with the Cape Fear River on one side and the ocean beach, parallel with the general course of the river, on the other. The point of the peninsula is at the southern end, where the New Inlet channel sweeps around it. The line of works known as Fort Fisher was erected near this end of the point. It consisted of two parts, a land face running nearly across the peninsula at right angles to the beach with its guns pointing north, and a sea face extending for a mile to the south and terminating in a battery called the Mound Battery, which commanded the New Inlet channel, just inside the outer bar. Another work, Fort Buchanan, on the extreme point, also commanded the New Inlet channel at its inner end. This channel was narrow and tortuous, filled with shoals constantly shifting, which formed an inner and an outer bar, and was extremely difficult of access to vessels of more than eight feet draft. Most of the blockade-runners were under this draft,\* and were guided in their entrance by temporary marks and range lights, placed in position by the garrison of the fort when the blockade-runner showed the prearranged signal. For

an attacking fleet the entrance was impracticable. None of the vessels could have attempted it except the smallest light-drafts, and even these in their ignorance of the channel would have been certain to ground under the guns of the fort.

The peninsula at the northern side or land face of the fort formed a plain half a mile wide. On its western side was the river-bank, and above it a slight ridge more or less wooded, which afforded an approach under cover to the fort. At the foot of the ridge and close to the river-bank ran the only road along the peninsula. At the end of the ridge a bridge over a swamp gave entrance to the work, the western end of the land face being about one hundred feet from the river. From this entrance the land face extended across the peninsula to its junction with the sea face, with which it formed a right angle. At this point, the northeasterly corner of the work, was a bastion. The outer slope of the fort was twenty feet high and the parapet twenty-five feet thick, the whole built of sand. Immense traverses were erected between the gun-chambers thirty feet in height and running back thirty feet from the parapet. They also projected twelve feet out on the parapet, forming a complete protection against enfilading fire. In each traverse was a bomb-proof. On the north or land face twenty guns, of the largest calibers, were mounted in barbette at regular intervals. The sea face consisted of a series of half a dozen separate batteries connected by curtains and terminating at the southern end in the Mound Battery. On the line of works along the sea face from the northeast bastion to the Mound, a mile in length, twenty-four heavy guns were mounted. The land face was further protected by a stockade of sharpened logs nine feet high, pierced for musketry, extend-

ing along its entire front, and continued from the northeast bastion down the beach to the water's edge. On the sandy plain of the peninsula in front of the stockade was a system of underground torpedoes, to be fired electrically from the interior of the fort, with which the torpedoes were connected by wires.

From the above description it will be seen that Fort Fisher was specially adapted to withstand the heaviest artillery fire, and that its defenders had some reason for considering it nearly invulnerable to this form of attack.

On the 13th of December the fleet sailed from Hampton Roads for the rendezvous, twenty-five miles east of the Cape Fear River. At noon of the 14th, Wednesday, the transport fleet put to sea, and it arrived at the rendezvous on the night of Thursday, the 15th. On the way down the ironclads had put in to Beaufort to fill up with ammunition. The powder-boat was also a source of delay at Beaufort, as a large part of the powder with which she was to be loaded had to be taken on board at that point. The portion of the fleet which was thus detained arrived at the rendezvous on the 18th, and the admiral proposed sending in the *Louisiana* to be exploded that night. The weather, however, although fair, was somewhat threatening, and apprehensive that it would interfere with the landing of the army, General Butler requested a postponement of the operation.<sup>1</sup>

The fleet now under Porter's command was the largest and most powerful ever assembled under the flag of the United States. It comprised over sixty vessels, of which five were armored, the heavy broadside ironclad *New Ironsides* and the monitors *Canonicus*, *Saugus*, *Mahopac*, and *Monadnock*. It included also three of the great screw frigates, the *Colorado*, *Minne-*

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, Navy, xi, 223, 224.

sota, and Wabash; the side-wheel steamers Powhatan and Susquehanna; the screw sloops Brooklyn, Shenandoah, Ticonderoga, Juniata, Tuscarora, Mohican, Kansas, Maumee, Nyack, Pequot, and Yantic; the 11-inch gunboats Chippewa, Huron, Seneca, and Unadilla; and the double-enders Iosco, Mackinac, Osceola, Pawtuxet, Pontoosuc, Sassacus, and Tacony; besides a host of smaller vessels, mounting altogether over six hundred guns. The unfortunate effect of postponing the expedition until the winter season was now apparent, for on the 20th a heavy gale came up from the southwest. Being unable to make a port without scattering the fleet, Porter formed the bold resolution of having the vessels ride out the gale at their anchors, a dangerous experiment for any of them, but peculiarly so for the monitors, whose seaworthy qualities under such conditions had never been tested. The transports with the troops on board very properly put in to Beaufort for shelter.

By the 23d the gale had broken, and the army not yet having reappeared, Porter determined not to wait for it, but to begin operations that night by the explosion of the Louisiana. This dangerous undertaking was in charge of Commander Rhind, a most gallant and capable officer, who followed minutely Porter's instructions and anchored the vessel as close in to the beach as possible at a distance of about three hundred yards from the fort. After setting his fuses and taking the further precaution to build a fire in the vessel in case the fuses failed to work, he got off with his party to the gunboat that was waiting for them and steamed out to the fleet, anxiously expecting the explosion. Every precaution had been taken to insure success. About an hour and a half after Rhind left the Louisiana the explosion took place. It produced no effect whatever on the fort or its



defenders. The report was heard for many miles, and Colonel Lamb, who commanded Fort Fisher, in response to a telegram of inquiry from General Whiting at Wilmington, replied that a Federal gunboat had blown up.

On the following day, the 24th, at daylight, the fleet got under way and stood in toward the fort in line of battle. At 11.30 the signal was given to engage, the Ironsides leading and the three monitors following. The utmost care had been taken in laying out the plan of the battle and a diagram issued to each of the captains, showing his exact position and the points at which his fire was to be directed. Nevertheless, so novel was the situation and so little were the officers and men accustomed to fleet operations of this extended character that great difficulty was experienced in getting some of the vessels in position, and it was only by the active movements of the flag-ship that the admiral at length succeeded in having his line of battle formed in the order that he had directed.

The fleet was arranged in three divisions. The first or northernmost division, containing the ironclads with a number of attendant gunboats mounting 11-inch guns, was so placed as to have a slightly oblique fire upon the land face and an enfilading fire upon the sea face. Of this division the ironclads were a little in advance, between three-quarters of a mile and a mile from the fort. The second division, comprising all the large unarmored ships, was directly opposite the northeast bastion and arranged in a crescent shape, with their broadsides to the fort, at a distance of a mile. The third division, composed chiefly of double-enders, was stationed farther to the south, in front of the sea face, at a slightly greater distance. In the rear of these three divisions were swift, light gunboats



and despatch vessels, to be employed as occasion might require. The vessels came into position at half past eleven; the firing became general about noon, and was continued for five hours. The fort made no serious attempt to reply to the attack. Being short of ammunition, Colonel Lamb used it sparingly, and restricted the fire of each gun to one shot every half-hour. This firing, in comparison with that of the fleet, seemed so feeble and desultory that Porter was led to believe that the works were actually silenced, which was not the case. Lamb fired on this day some six hundred projectiles, but without producing any casualties except the perforation of the boiler of the Mackinac, by which a dozen or more of her crew were scalded. A number of men, however, were killed or wounded by the bursting of five 100-pounder Parrott guns on board the various vessels, which led the admiral to recommend the removal of all guns of this class. Three guns in the fort were rendered unserviceable by the disabling of carriages.

On the morning of the next day, Christmas, all the transports arrived. General Butler was much mortified and disappointed at the unimportant results accomplished by the powder-boat, but nevertheless it was arranged early in the morning between General Weitzel and the admiral that the attack of the fleet upon the fort should be renewed, while the army landed and assaulted it, the fleet in the meantime continuing its bombardment. Immediately after the interview Porter sent in his light gun-boats to the number of thirty or more to cover and assist the landing. The troops being thus supplied with a great number of boats, quickly landed half their number, about three thousand men, five miles north of the fort. From this point skirmishers were thrown out, who advanced down the beach toward the land face. While this was

going on, the fleet, which had already formed in line of battle, opened fire again upon the fort and received the same feeble and ineffective reply as before. The bombardment itself at this time was considerably slackened, the intention being to redouble it as soon as the signal for assault was made.

Presently, to Porter's surprise, he learned that the army was reembarking, and upon inquiry he received word from General Butler that the place could not be carried by assault, as it was still substantially uninjured, and that he had concluded to withdraw the troops and sail for Hampton Roads, abandoning the expedition. Butler also suggested as an additional reason for his conclusion that a supporting force of the enemy was encamped, or was about arriving, on the peninsula to the northward, and that he would then be placed between two fires. His men accordingly returned to the transports that night, with the exception of seven hundred, who, in the hurry of embarkation in the heavy sea, were left ashore without provisions.

Porter's instructions to Captain Alden of the Brooklyn in reference to getting off this detachment are so characteristic as to be worth quoting:

*December 26, 1864.*

DEAR ALDEN: We must get those poor devils of soldiers off to-day, or we will lose them; they are starving for want of provisions and water. I want you to go in and see what the Brooklyn can do. Rig a large raft out of spars, get the end of a hawser on shore to them, and with another hawser to the raft you can get them through the surf; or lash two boats together and let them drop in. Get provisions to them (and water) at all hazards.

I know the sailors are not all dead on board the Brooklyn, and you can do it. I send a tug for you to use. Anchor her securely outside the breakers and drift the raft in, and

let them haul out to the tug, when the boats will take them off; and won't I be glad to get rid of them! Ain't a soldier troublesome? Go at it as soon as it is light enough; we can have them all off by twelve. There are seven hundred on shore.

Yours very truly,

D. D. PORTER.

Porter was incensed almost beyond bounds at Butler's abandonment of the expedition. The garrison at this time comprised, according to General Whiting, one thousand and seventy-seven men.<sup>1</sup> The attacking force of troops amounted to sixty-five hundred men.<sup>2</sup> It was true that a supporting force was arriving at Wilmington, and that a portion of it was already at Sugar Loaf, seven miles up the beach. It was also true that the batteries had not been silenced, although ten guns out of forty-four at the end of the second day's bombardment had been rendered unserviceable; but the fleet and the army were both in perfect condition, the active operations had but just begun, and if the batteries had not been sufficiently disabled to justify the assault at that moment, which was probably true, another day's bombardment would have attained the desired object. There was nothing further to be done, as General Butler was an independent commander and could sail away when he pleased. General Grant's comment in his official indorsement of Butler's report says:

My despatches to General Butler will show his report to be in error where he states that he returned after having effected a landing in obedience to my instructions. On the contrary, these instructions contemplated no withdrawal or no failure after a landing was made.<sup>3</sup>

Porter announced in his report:

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, Army, xlii, 1, 979, 980.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., xlii, 1, 972.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., xlii, 1, 970.

Until further orders I shall go on and hammer away at the forts, hoping that in time the people in them will get tired and hand them over to us. It is a one-sided business altogether, and in the course of time we must dismount their guns if, as General Weitzel says, we can not injure it as a defensive work.

Porter was as good as his word. As heavy weather came on immediately after, he sent the ships by twos and threes to rendezvous at Beaufort, but he never for a moment gave up the idea of continuing his attack and capturing the fort. Meantime he continued to write to the department at short intervals more or less savage letters, to which General Butler was not slow to reply, and the controversy continued with great bitterness long after the war. To Porter's tenacity, however, was due the renewal of the expedition. The Navy Department again took up the matter directly with General Grant, informing him that Porter was confident that the ships could approach nearer the works, that their fire could keep the enemy away from the guns, that a landing could easily be effected upon the beach to the northward not only of troops, but of all their supplies and artillery, that the force could have its flanks protected by gunboats, and finally, that the admiral would remain off Fort Fisher, continuing a moderate fire to prevent new works from being erected. The result of this communication, sent on the 29th of December, was that on the 30th General Grant wrote to Porter this significant letter:

Please hold on where you are for a few days, and I will endeavor to be back again with an increased force and without the former commander. It is desirable the enemy should be lulled into all the security possible in hopes he will send back here or against Sherman the reenforcements sent to defend Wilmington. At the same time, it will be

necessary to observe that the enemy does not entrench further, and, if he attempts it, to prevent it. I will suggest whether it may not be made to appear that the ordinary blockading squadron is doing this. You, however, understand this matter much better than I do. I can not say what day our troops will be down. Your despatch to the Secretary of the Navy, which informed me that you were still off Wilmington and still thought the capture of that place practicable, was only received to-day. I took immediate steps to have transports collected, and am assured they will be ready with the coal and water on board by noon of the 2d of January. There will be no delay in embarking and sending off the troops. . . . The commander of the expedition will probably be Major-General Terry. . . . The same troops that were with the first expedition, reenforced by a brigade, will be sent now. If they effect a lodgment, they can at least fortify and maintain themselves until reenforcements can be sent. Please answer by bearer and designate when you will have the fleet congregated.

This letter, evincing so complete a change of purpose on the part of the lieutenant-general, as well as considerable regret at the events which had taken place, was received by Porter with a sense of immense relief. Two days later he wrote to Grant:

I shall be all ready, and thank God we are not to leave here with so easy a victory at hand. Thank you for so promptly trying to rectify the blunder so lately committed. I knew you would do it.

On the 3d General Grant issued his orders to General Terry. In these orders he did what he could to prevent a recurrence of the hasty disappearance of the army. He says:

It is exceedingly desirable that the most complete understanding should exist between yourself and the naval commander. I suggest, therefore, that you consult with Ad-

miral Porter freely and get from him the part to be performed by each branch of the public service, so that there may be unity of action. It would be well to have the whole program laid down in writing. I have served with Admiral Porter, and know that you can rely on his judgment and his nerve to undertake what he proposes. I would therefore defer to him as much as is consistent with your own responsibilities.

After stating that the first object to be attained is "to get a firm position on the spit of land on which Fort Fisher is built," the general adds: "If such a position can be obtained, the siege of Fort Fisher will not be abandoned until its reduction is accomplished or another plan of campaign is ordered from these headquarters." With a general like Terry, acting under these instructions, which Terry was directed to show to the admiral, there was little doubt that the contest would be fought out to a finish.

On the 8th of January, 1865, General Terry arrived with the transports at Beaufort. Again the weather was threatening, and a heavy gale came up which lasted for two days and nights. The ships of war all held on and again rode out the gale at their anchors except the Colorado, which, having but one anchor left, was obliged to go to sea. On the 12th the fleet, having filled up with coal and ammunition, steamed away for Fort Fisher, accompanied by the transports.

On the morning of the 13th the fleet again got into position and renewed its attack upon the fort. The general disposition of the vessels was similar to that in the previous action, but with important changes in detail. The Brooklyn, which had been in the second line, was now placed astern of the New Ironsides in the ironclad division. This division, comprising the four monitors,

was stationed at least a quarter of a mile closer in to the fort and also farther to the southward, giving a better enfilading fire upon the land face. The first and second divisions of unarmored ships were also moved in closer, and the fire of the heavy vessels was more concentrated upon the land face. The vessels took their positions much more readily, and the fleet worked with far greater efficiency and unity of action, showing what might have been done if the first attack had been a little further prolonged. The scattering and diffused fire which marked the action of Christmas eve was no longer observable, and nothing could surpass the steadiness and accuracy of the gunnery practice upon the land front. The effects of close supervision and direction upon the fleet were manifest from the start.

At eight o'clock the ironclads were in position and firing deliberately, and so continued during the entire day. At 8.30 signal was made to the fleet to send boats to the transports to land the troops. By two o'clock in the afternoon the entire command, composed of eight thousand men, had been landed with entrenching tools and twelve days' provisions. Immediately after, the first division of wooden ships was signaled to take position in front of the batteries, and the second to weigh and proceed to the attack. The third division was directed to remain to the northward, to cover the troops and land the field-artillery. The heavy ships got into position without casualty, and their fire was kept up from four o'clock until after dark, when the wooden vessels were ordered to haul out and anchor. The monitors and the Ironsides kept up the fire during the night.

On the 14th Porter adopted a new plan. The ironclads having closed up to within one thousand yards, the gunboats carrying 11-inch guns were ordered in to fire



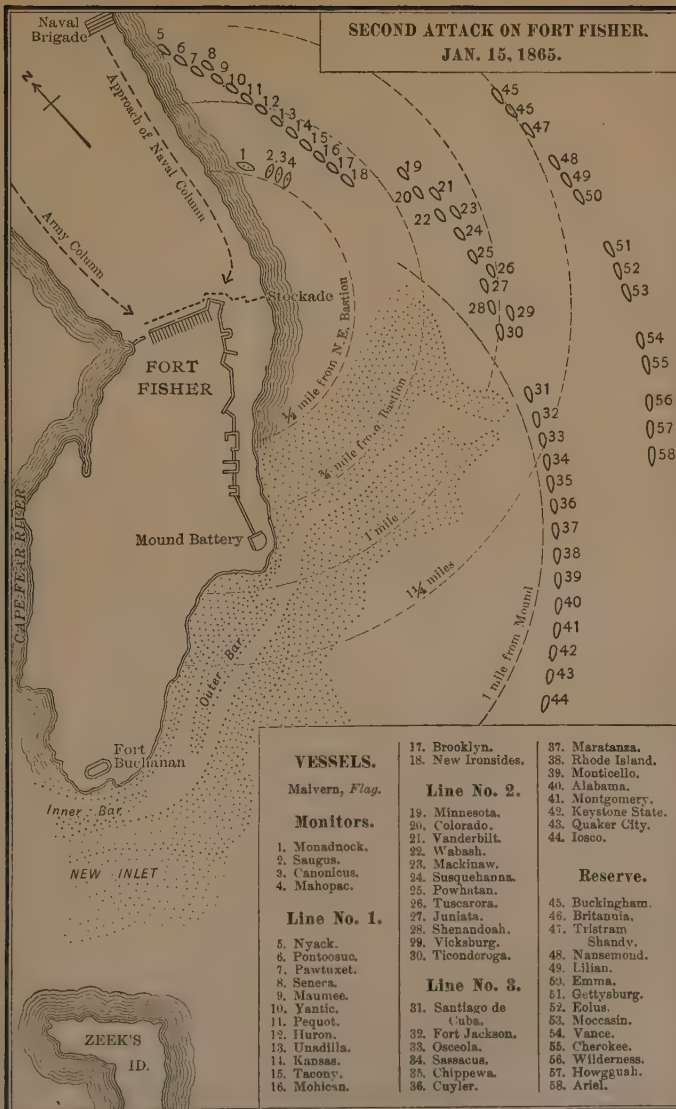
slowly and deliberately with the specific purpose of dismounting the guns on the land face. Meantime the Brooklyn was directed to throw in a quick fire to keep the garrison from working their guns. This attack lasted from one o'clock until long after dark, and again an intermittent fire was kept up during the night. Meantime the troops had rested after their confinement on ship-board and were preparing for the assault. That evening General Terry came off to the flag-ship and the plan of battle for the next day was agreed upon.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the 15th the vessels were again formed in three lines, according to the original plan, and at eleven they were in position and the bombardment was renewed. At this time the concentrated fire of the fleet upon the fort was terrific. The assault was fixed for three o'clock. Before the time arrived every gun except one upon the land face was dismounted. The parapets and traverses were torn up, the stockade was breached or knocked down, and the ground in front of the land face was so plowed up that all the wires operating the torpedoes in the plain below were cut. Never before had a fleet attack accomplished such a demolition. The sea face also showed marks of serious injury, but not to the same extent, while the Mound Battery and Fort Buchanan, which were at a greater distance, remained intact. Except for a single gun on the northeast bastion, nothing was left on the north face of the fort; although two light pieces which were kept in readiness to run out into the redoubt in front of the sally-port in the middle of this face and one which guarded the approach on the river-bank were still available.

In the meantime the army by gradual approaches were working down along the western side of the peninsula under cover of the timber and the inequalities of

# SECOND ATTACK ON FORT FISHER.

JAN. 15, 1865.



## VESSELS.

Malvern, Flag.

## Monitors.

1. Monadnock.
2. Saugus.
3. Canonicus.
4. Mahopac.

## Line No. 1.

5. Nyack.
6. Pontoosuc.
7. Pawtuxet.
8. Seneca.
9. Maumee.
10. Yantic.
11. Pequot.
12. Huron.
13. Unadilla.
14. Kansas.
15. Tacony.
16. Mohican.

17. Brooklyn.
18. New Ironsides.

## Line No. 2.

19. Minnesota.
20. Colorado.
21. Vanderbilt.
22. Wabash.
23. Mackinaw.
24. Susquehanna.
25. Powhatan.
26. Tuscarora.
27. Junata.
28. Shenandoah.
29. Vicksburg.
30. Ticonderoga.

## Line No. 3.

31. Santiago de Cuba.
32. Fort Jackson.
33. Osceola.
34. Sassacus.
35. Chippewa.
36. Cuyler.

37. Maratanza.
38. Rhode Island.
39. Monticello.
40. Alabama.
41. Montgomery.
42. Keystone State.
43. Quaker City.
44. Iosco.

## Reserve.

45. Buckingham.
46. Britania.
47. Tristram Shandy.
48. Nansemond.
49. Lilian.
50. Emma.
51. Gettysburg.
52. Eolus.
53. Moccasin.
54. Vance.
55. Cherokee.
56. Wilderness.
57. Howgah.
58. Ariel.



the ground, which were found on that side. General Ames led the assaulting column with Curtis's brigade in the van. At each forward movement the brigade would entrench itself, and when its entrenchment was completed make a farther advance, the brigade in the rear taking position in the entrenchment which it had just left, the latter's place being in turn supplied by the next brigade, and so on until by gradual approaches the advance of the army had got in close to the works. Meantime the bombardment continued until the signal should be made by General Terry for the final assault.

To divert attention from the attack of the army, the admiral had determined to land a naval brigade to take part in the assault. The plan was well conceived, and accomplished even greater results than Porter had expected, though at considerable sacrifice. A few years later the operation of well-armed and well-equipped naval brigades as infantry on shore became a recognized and familiar employment of seamen; but at this date it was a novel undertaking, and the men were ill prepared for it, both in training and in weapons. It is possible that Breese, who commanded the landing party, and who was also chief of staff, might have perfected his organization more completely before landing his force; but the main difficulty lay in the fact that the seamen of that period were not suitably trained or armed for such a movement, and that, owing to the rapidity of their advance when the signal for the assault was given, it was mistaken by the enemy for the principal attack.

The naval brigade was composed of sixteen hundred bluejackets from the fleet, comprising detachments of varying numbers from many different vessels, and four hundred marines. The boats put ashore their detachments at one o'clock. As the assault of the army and

the navy was to be simultaneous and was fixed for three o'clock, there was little time for preparation after the men had landed. The admiral's purpose was to have the naval column move down the beach and assault the fort on the east or sea face, while the army moved down the river-bank and assaulted on the west. The marines were to be arranged in divisions and were to advance from one position to another much in the same way as the assaulting columns of the army. They were to be assisted by a party of sappers with entrenching tools, in charge of Lieutenant Preston, one of the admiral's aides, an exceedingly gallant officer on whom he placed the greatest reliance. The marines were armed with the service musket, and were to cover the advance of the blue-jackets. When the marines were established in the most advanced position that they could reach, the bluejackets, who carried only cutlasses and pistols, were to advance at the charge along the beach, and, passing through the openings in the stockade, to swarm up the sea face where the slope of the parapet afforded an easy ascent, and, as Porter said in his order, "to board the fort on the run in a seamanlike way." By this means Porter hoped to succeed in introducing his force of two thousand seamen and marines practically unopposed into the fort while its garrison was occupied with the assault of the army at the other extremity of the land face.

The plan, considered as a diversion, was completely successful, although not exactly in the way that had been intended. It was imperfectly carried out because of a want of organization, which prevented the officers from keeping their men well in hand, and also because Breese was too precipitate in his attack. Instead of conforming to the plan of entrenching, which had been successfully begun, he presently withdrew the entire force of marines

from their rifle-pits, and, advancing his men at the double-quick, carried the entire body of marines along with them. The result was a somewhat confused approach along the beach with a dash which was premature because it began too far away, and which was liable to result in disaster, being without support and almost without cover. Nevertheless, all might have gone well had it not been that the column became too much spread out in its advance, and its head, upon arriving at the stockade, halted for the rear to come up. Those behind, not knowing what was wanted of them, instead of coming up, halted also.

In the meantime the enemy, seeing what appeared to be the principal force approaching boldly to the assault up the beach, and unaware of the fact that the real attack was on the other side, mistook this for the main body, and concentrated its defense at the northeast bastion. The naval column, instead of finding the works deserted at its point of attack, was opposed by more than half of the enemy's effective force on the parapet above them, which poured in upon them a galling small-arm fire at short range. The field-pieces in the half-moon battery in front of the sally-port were also trained upon them, and the single gun that was left on the bastion opened with a shower of grape. As only one-fifth of the attacking party carried arms with which they could reply to any fire, the remainder, comprising the bluejackets, found their position untenable, and they broke from the rear and fell back by the way they had come. It was unfortunate, but it was inevitable in the concurrence of events. No human being could stand defenseless and uncovered under such a fire, and although they were almost on the point of success, some even reaching the slope of the parapet, they were compelled to abandon all they had gained. Not only that, but the first fire upon

them had brought them down by scores, and the number of casualties was increased in their retreat. A few at the head of the column preferred to stay where they were rather than go back, and obtained a precarious shelter behind the broken stockade, where they remained during the whole afternoon. Among these were Breese, Selfridge, Sicard, Cushman, Bartlett, Parker, and other officers, with sixty of the men. Preston was killed outright at the first fire, and Porter, the captain of the Malvern, another brave young officer, shared his fate. Evans, Lamson, and many others were seriously wounded. In the entire body of two thousand men there were in this short encounter over three hundred killed or wounded.

The naval assault, however, succeeded, as has been said, even better than Porter intended. While Colonel Lamb, commanding the post, was congratulating himself upon having thus successfully repulsed the main assault, to accomplish which he had concentrated at that point the greater part of the garrison, he suddenly turned and saw three National flags flying on the parapet on his left. Then for the first time he realized the situation and the mistake he had made. But it was too late. The assaulting troops were already within the works, and though Lamb drew off his force from the bastion to meet this new danger, though he and his men fought with desperate stubbornness, being only dislodged from one traverse to make a stand in the next, though both he and General Whiting were wounded and his men held out long after they were beaten, yet the result of the battle was assured when Terry's attacking column had effected a lodgment inside the fort. That it might have accomplished this result without the naval assault is possible, but it would have been a far more difficult and disastrous operation. Even as it was, the defense showed no sign of weakening until



Porter, seeing the precise situation, caused the New Ironsides, whose firing had been extraordinarily accurate, to drop shells into the gun-chambers which the garrison were still occupying, and from which they were fighting the assailants across the intervening traverses.

By nine o'clock at night the fort had surrendered and the troops were in undisturbed possession. So complete had been the destruction wrought by the bombardment that not a cannon had been fired at them during the assault. The surrender was rather a collapse than a capitulation. Nineteen hundred prisoners were taken, showing that the garrison was about double that at the first attack. There were also captured forty-four heavy guns and a number of field-pieces. The supporting force under Bragg, which was only seven miles away and which numbered five thousand men, did nothing to assist in the defense of the fort. This was the force, a part of which had caused Butler to decamp so hastily. On the following night Fort Caswell was blown up, and all of the lower defenses of the Cape Fear River were abandoned.

For this great and signal victory Admiral Porter received by name, for the third time in his career, the thanks of Congress, a distinction which has never before or since fallen to the lot of any officer of the navy.

The victory was unique in military and naval history. As Colonel Lamb has well said :

For the first time in the history of sieges the land defenses of the works were destroyed, not by any act of the besieging army, but by the concentrated fire, direct and enfilading, of an immense fleet poured upon them without intermission, until torpedo-wires were cut, palisades breached so that they actually afforded cover for assailants, and the slopes of the work were rendered practicable for assault.

During the first attack the admiral had attempted to sound and buoy out the bar by the use of small boats. The channel, such as it was, across the bar was full of intricacies and was directly commanded by the Mound Battery, close to which it lay. Beyond this was the Rip or inner bar, commanded by Fort Buchanan. The boats were presently called away to assist in the landing of the army, but enough was done to show that none of the fighting vessels could be hazarded in the channel until the fort was reduced. After the surrender, when the bars had been dragged for torpedoes and the channel had been sounded and marked, several of the gunboats and other light-draft vessels went in, but it took three days to clear out the passage so as to make the operation reasonably safe. Porter himself went through in a picket-boat on the afternoon of the 16th.

On the 17th, all signs of the battle and the surrender having been removed, the admiral directed that the range-lights which the Confederates had been in the habit of setting for the blockade-runners should be renewed and that everything should be arranged to conceal the capture of the fort; and accordingly on the following night two blockade-runners, the Stag and Charlotte, came in by the range-lights only to find themselves prizes when they anchored alongside the National gunboats.

It remained for the fleet, now in possession of the mouth of the river, to push its way up to Wilmington. The town was situated twenty miles above New Inlet. On the banks of the river were strong fortifications, the most powerful, Fort Anderson, mounting ten heavy guns. Abreast of it was a strong barrier which crossed the river with a triple row of piles. The fleet, in conjunction with the army, now under General Schofield, was engaged in attacking the fort for a whole week

beginning with the 11th of February. Porter had with him one monitor, the Montauk, and a number of light-drafts, and he again made effective use of a dummy monitor modeled on the famous conqueror of the *Indiana*. During the week the vessels were engaged by turns with the fort, and on the 18th the entire force of gunboats, together with the monitor, kept up a heavy fire through the day until late in the afternoon. The batteries were silenced by three o'clock, but the fire of the gunboats was still continued, and in the night the fort was evacuated before Schofield's troops could get in the rear to prevent the escape of the garrison. The obstructions were immediately blown up and the fleet passed up the river.

The next four days were days of severe and trying work for the squadron. It was still twelve miles below Wilmington, the banks were lined with batteries, and the channel had been planted with torpedoes, in the manufacture and operation of which at this time the Confederates had developed great skill. Movable torpedoes were also employed, and on the night of the 20th two hundred of these were sent down, one of which got in the wheel of the *Osceola* and blew it to pieces, knocking down her bulkheads. Porter had out a strong force of picket-boats, and the torpedoes were sunk with musketry or picked up with nets which were spread across the river. Notwithstanding this tremendous torpedo attack, little injury was done to the fleet except in the case of the *Osceola*. The four days following the surrender of Fort Anderson were occupied in constant fighting, while the utmost vigilance was used to protect the ships from torpedoes. One by one the batteries along the banks surrendered or were abandoned, and at length, on the 22d, the last work had been reduced and Wilming-

ton was occupied. Again Porter marked the close of a long and arduous campaign by a great victory upon a national holiday ; and as at Vicksburg the national salute of the Fourth of July had celebrated the fall of the great stronghold of the Confederates on the Mississippi, so the national salute on the birthday of Washington celebrated the capture of the last port of the Confederate blockade-runners.

## CHAPTER XV

### FINAL SCENES IN THE JAMES RIVER

By the fall of Wilmington General Schofield was enabled to pursue his march to the interior and effect a junction with Sherman at Goldsboro. The fleet which up to that time had been occupied in the Cape Fear River was now released for duties elsewhere, and before the day of the capture was out the admiral was taking steps for its dispersal. On that very day the *Wilderness*, *Nansemond*, and *Vicksburg* were ordered to Hampton Roads, and the *Pontoosuc* to Albemarle Sound. The next day the *Pequot*, *Shawmut*, and five other vessels were also ordered to Hampton Roads, while others were sent to join *Macomb* in the Sounds or to cruise along the coast. A few days later the admiral proceeded himself with the *Malvern* to Beaufort. On the 3d of March he arrived in the Rhode Island at Hampton Roads, and on the next day transferred his flag to the *Bat* and proceeded to Washington, where he had been summoned to testify before the Committee on the Conduct of the War, which was then in session. During his absence the James River squadron was commanded by Commodore Radford.

As soon as the admiral's duties in Washington were completed he returned in the *Bat* to the James River, taking with him Assistant Secretary Fox. His flag-ship, the *Malvern*, had in the meantime received a much-needed overhauling at the navy-yard. Porter immediately took

charge and proceeded up the river to Trent's Reach, where the division of ironclads was now effectively guarding the barrier to prevent the passage down of the Confederate squadron. During his absence on the Wilmington campaign, on the night of January 23d, the Confederate ships had attempted to pass the obstructions, and, owing to the incapacity of the captain then in command of the Onondaga, came very near succeeding. The Fredericksburg actually got through, but the other vessels ran aground and the whole force retreated, after the gunboat Drewry had been blown up by the fire from the forts. This was the last attempt to pass the barrier. The squadron had in the meantime been reinforced by the monitors that had participated in the attack on Fort Fisher, and Porter had issued instructions to govern them in case of a second attempt. It was not deemed advisable either by the authorities at Washington or by General Grant that the naval force should take the offensive.

It was now the 20th of March, and the armies on both sides, which had been watching each other all winter, were only waiting until the roads should be in a condition which would make possible operations in the field. It was the commencement of the closing act in the great drama of the Civil War, which had lasted for four years, and in which the final blow was now to be struck. Sherman, after the fall of Savannah, had moved up through the Carolinas, keeping in touch with the navy on the coast, and Schofield had joined him from Wilmington. The army of Grant, with its left threatening Petersburg, south of the James, and its right extending far up toward Richmond on the north bank of the river, was ready to begin operations as soon as the roads were opened. Sheridan had been recalled from his campaign in north-

ern Virginia, and was approaching the river to cross it and join Grant's left to the south of Petersburg. The last ten days of March were days of waiting, and the duties of the fleet on the James were confined to the patrol of the river, the maintenance of communications, and guarding the obstructions at Trent's Reach.

It was Sunday, the 19th of March, when the admiral arrived at Trent's Reach and was joined by the Malvern. On the following morning he came down with Fox to City Point and passed the day with General Grant. The general had for some time been desirous that before he took the field in the spring campaign the President should come down to City Point, where he could obtain the rest he so much needed and could have a final consultation on the course of action to be pursued in the campaign. An invitation was accordingly sent to him that morning by telegraph, and on the same day the President sent word that he would come.<sup>1</sup> This settled, Fox left City Point for Washington, and the admiral again proceeded up the river to the front, where he remained for the next week, either at Trent's Reach or just below at Aiken's Landing, near the entrance of the unfinished Dutch Gap Canal.

On Thursday, the 23d of March, Mr. Lincoln left Washington in the *River Queen*, one of the Potomac boats which still plies in the summer as a passenger steamer between Washington and Norfolk. He had with him Mrs. Lincoln and his son "Tad." The *River Queen* was convoyed by the *Bat*, which had been sent to Washington for the purpose. The *Bat* had been a fast and famous blockade-runner, but had been taken into the service, and was now commanded by Lieutenant-Commander John S. Barnes. For the next two weeks the

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<sup>1</sup> War Records, Army, xlvii, iii, 50.



Bat served as tender to the River Queen. During these two weeks, which were destined to be almost the closing weeks of his life, the President remained in close touch with the campaign to the south of the James River, and Admiral Porter, whom the course of naval operations left comparatively free, was his constant companion. There is no more dramatic episode in Porter's life than that which threw him, during these last days—when the curtain was about to fall upon the scene of the four years' struggle and at the same time upon the life of the President, who had been its central figure—into close and familiar companionship with Mr. Lincoln, who had been the first to recognize his qualities, and whose unswerving support had secured for him the opportunities that were to place him among the foremost of the world's naval commanders.

When the President arrived at City Point late on the evening of Friday, March 24th, Porter was still at Aiken's Landing in the Malvern, keeping in hand his advance-guard, on the watch for an attack from the Confederate ironclads. The next day he dropped down to the pontoon bridge at Jones's Landing, a few miles below Aiken's, to assist the crossing of Sheridan's army, which was then approaching from White House by the Newmarket road. On Sunday morning Sheridan arrived, flushed with the successes of his brilliant campaign of the past two months, and at one o'clock the crossing of the army began. While it was in progress the President came up in the River Queen from City Point, with General Grant and General Ord. After an hour on board the flag-ship Porter took them in his barge up the river to the neighborhood of the obstructions in Trent's Reach, where the monitors were stationed. The rest of the afternoon was spent at General Ord's headquarters, and a little before

seven in the evening the River Queen returned to City Point.

The next day, which was Monday, the 27th, the admiral, who was still at Aiken's Landing, received a telegram from General Grant giving him the welcome news that General Sherman would arrive at City Point that evening, and adding: "Can not you come down and see him? He will probably return to-night, and I know will be disappointed if he does not meet you."

Sherman, whose army was at this time near Goldsboro, in the interior of North Carolina, had hurriedly crossed the country on a locomotive over the newly constructed railroad to New Berne and Morehead City, where he had embarked for Hampton Roads and arrived late that afternoon at Grant's headquarters. Porter left Aiken's Landing before five o'clock, and shortly after six the Malvern was at anchor at City Point. A few minutes later the admiral went ashore to find his old companion in arms, whom he had not seen since the close of the Mississippi campaign, nearly two years before. As soon as they had exchanged greetings the three commanding officers, Grant, Sherman, and Porter, went on board the River Queen for a conference with the President, which was renewed on the following morning.

It was at these two famous conferences that the President announced the policy of amnesty which he had decided to adopt toward the rebels after the expected surrender. In the situation as it then existed, Sherman in North Carolina had General Johnston in his power, and Grant was no less confident of his ability to dispose of the army of General Lee. The only question was whether Lee might not succeed in making a junction with Johnston before Grant could come up with him, but General Sherman was sure that he could hold the com-

bined forces in check for a limited time. All the three officers believed that the settlement of the issue would require one more bloody battle, to which the President, whose magnanimity and tenderness of heart never showed more strongly than on this occasion, was resolutely opposed. He expressed his opposition to it with the strongest emphasis. To the question of terms of surrender he was indifferent. He wanted the surrender on any terms. All that he desired was to see the capitulation of the Confederate armies, and to get the men composing them back to their homes at work on their farms and in their shops. He wanted them to lay down their arms and resume their civil pursuits, and he was ready to guarantee them all their rights as citizens of the common country. Such is Sherman's statement. Porter quotes the President as saying:

Let them once surrender and reach their homes, they won't take up arms again; let them all go, officers and all; I want submission and no more bloodshed. Let them have their horses to plow with, and, if you like, their guns to shoot crows with. I want no one punished. Treat them liberally all round. We want those people to return to their allegiance to the Union and submit to the laws. Again I say, give them the most liberal and honorable terms.

It is well known how faithfully both Grant and Sherman, when the end came, followed these instructions. It will be remembered that Grant in drawing the terms of surrender at Appomattox made this remarkable provision:

The arms, artillery, and public property to be parked and stacked and turned over to the officers appointed by me to receive them. This will not embrace the side-arms of the officers nor their private horses or baggage. This done, each officer and man will be allowed to return to his home,

not to be disturbed by the United States authorities so long as they observe their paroles and the laws in force where they may reside.

And in reply to the suggestion of General Lee that in the Confederate army the cavalrymen and artillerists owned their horses he made the famous rejoinder: "I will instruct the officers I shall appoint to receive the paroles to let all the men who claim to own a horse or mule take the animals home with them to work their little farms."

The new administration which came into control after the death of Lincoln charged Sherman with grave error in the liberality of the terms which he offered to Johnston, and even proposed relieving him of his command, an indignity for which the great general never forgave Mr. Stanton. Sherman subsequently referred for his justification to the conference in the cabin of the *River Queen* at City Point and to the instructions then outlined by President Lincoln, and Porter willingly gave his testimony to confirm General Sherman's statement of the interview.

The course of operations for the coming campaign having been agreed upon, Sherman, on the afternoon of Tuesday, the 28th, steamed down the river in the *Bat*. Porter had ordered her to take him with the utmost speed back to New Berne to join his army, the President having expressed great concern at its situation during his absence. On the following day the final campaign of the war was begun. Says General Horace Porter of the scene that morning at City Point:

It was nine o'clock in the morning of the 29th of March, 1865. General Grant and the officers of his staff had bidden good-by to President Lincoln and mounted the passenger-car of the special train that was to carry them from City

Point to the front, and the signal was given to start; the train moved off; Grant's last campaign had begun. Since three o'clock that morning the columns had been in motion and the Union army and the Army of Northern Virginia were soon locked in a death grapple. The President remained at City Point, where he could be promptly informed of the progress of the movement.

During the next ten days the admiral, after providing for the needs of the squadron, which the completeness of his organization made a slight burden, devoted himself to the care of the President, and was constantly in his company. An hour after Grant's train had left for the front Porter took Mr. Lincoln in his barge in tow of a tug as far up as the forts on the Appomattox, and thence to the squadron lying at Bermuda Hundred, from which gunboats, whose cooperation Grant had requested, were despatched up the Appomattox. The army was now engaged to the south of Richmond, and there was little for Porter's fleet to do but await the result of the campaign which had begun at Five Forks and was to end at Appomattox Court-House. During the next three days the President and the admiral passed much of their time in reading and discussing the telegrams which arrived hourly from the front, often going together to the telegraph-office temporarily established in a hut at City Point, where Colonel Bowers, who had been left in charge, received Grant's despatches, and here they followed with their maps the progress of the army from day to day.

It was a singular circumstance which brought these two men together at this critical period in a remote spot, where all was quiet, and where the President could obtain the brief repose and seclusion he was seeking, although but a few miles away the last great armies of the Nation

and of the Confederates were engaged in their final struggle. From time to time officials and statesmen came to City Point—the Vice-President, the Secretary of State, and members of Congress—but to all of them the President uniformly denied himself, and it was the admiral's duty to prevent all intrusion upon his solitude; and no less a pleasure, for it left the way free to him to indulge a companionship which remained forever afterward one of the saddest but most grateful memories of his life. The natural sympathy between the two men has been already alluded to; and if this could exist at a time when the subordinate was on trial and in active service, working out his part in the great problem of the country's salvation, much stronger would be its influence in these last moments when the trial had been met, when the admiral's part in the work was over, and when all that remained was to await the final result. Never before had any man made so deep an impression upon the admiral's self-reliant nature—a nature which, however finely tempered, could be as hard as steel. It was not merely by the wide sweep of his intelligence and by the acuteness of his observation of men and things that the President created this profound impression, nor was it by the presence of those subtle qualities of temperament that the two men had in common. It was by the marvelous gentleness and sweetness of Lincoln's character, his loyalty and simple straightforwardness, and his unswerving devotion to duty. In describing these days Porter says of the President:

To me he was one of the most interesting men I ever met. He had an originality about him which was peculiarly his own, and one felt when with him as if he could confide his dearest secret to him with absolute security against its betrayal. There, it might be said, was "God's noblest



work—an honest man,” and such he was all through. I have not a particle of the bump of veneration on my head, but I saw more to admire in this man, more to reverence, than I had believed possible. He had a load to bear that few men could carry, yet he traveled on with it, footsore and weary, but without complaint; rather, on the contrary, cheering those who would faint on the roadside. He was not a demonstrative man, so no one will ever know amid all the trials he underwent how much he had to contend with and how often he was called upon to sacrifice his own opinions to those of others who he felt did not know as much about matters at issue as he did himself. When he did surrender, it was always with a pleasant manner, winding up with a characteristic story.

In the strife between the North and the South there was no bitterness in Mr. Lincoln's composition. He seemed to think only that he had an unpleasant duty to perform, and endeavored to perform it as smoothly as possible. He would without doubt have yielded a good deal to the South only that he kept his duty constantly before his eyes, and that was the compass by which he steered at all times. The results of a battle pained him as much as if he was receiving the wounds himself, for I have often heard him express himself in pained accents while talking over some of the scenes of the war; he was not the man to assume a character for feelings he did not possess. He was as guileless in some respects as a child. How could one avoid liking such a man?

On Saturday, the 1st of April, Mrs. Lincoln returned to Washington, leaving with the President only his young son “Tad” and Captain Penrose, who had come with him as aide. The President was thus more than ever dependent upon Porter. That evening by the admiral's direction a demonstration was made by the advance-guard of monitors, the object being to divert the attention of the enemy. On this day and the next heavy



firing was heard at City Point from several directions, both toward Richmond and about Petersburg. On the afternoon of Sunday, the 2d, General Ord sent for a detachment to take care of his prisoners, and as no troops had been left at City Point, the admiral, at Colonel Bowers's request, sent five hundred seamen from the fleet, who returned in the evening with three thousand prisoners that Ord had captured. This Sunday, the 2d of April, was a day big with momentous events, for it saw the fall of both Richmond and Petersburg. In the night both cities were evacuated.

At 8.15 on the morning of Monday, April 3d, General Weitzel entered Richmond. Shortly before daybreak on that morning heavy explosions had been heard in the direction of Dutch Gap. These were caused by the destruction of the Confederate ironclads, which had so long but so fruitlessly threatened the safety of the National occupation of the river. The principal vessels were blown up, and Semmes, their commanding officer, withdrew with his men. General Grant, who had not yet learned of the critical situation at Richmond, telegraphed to the President to meet him at Petersburg, and at nine o'clock on Monday morning Mr. Lincoln started, accompanied by the admiral. Tad Lincoln went with them. They went out by rail as far as Patrick Station, at which point General Grant had provided horses and an escort, with which they rode to Petersburg. After staying with the President an hour and a half they returned, and at five o'clock reached City Point in safety. Here they found a telegram from Mr. Stanton asking the President not to expose himself by going to the front, to which the President replied that he had already gone and come back. He added, "I will take care of myself."

On Tuesday, the 4th, the President decided to go to

Richmond. Already the night before Porter had given orders to the commanding officer at the front to remove the obstructions in the river, and had prepared elaborate directions for fishing up the torpedoes with which it was planted. By nine o'clock in the morning the work had been completed, and the River Queen started on her passage up the James to the fallen capital of the Confederates. On the journey up, the Bat led the way, followed by the Malvern, and the latter in turn followed by the River Queen. At noon the three vessels reached Aiken's Landing, and twenty minutes later passed the monitors at their station in Trent's Reach. At half past one the vessels anchored near Fort Darling. Ten minutes before, the Bat had touched lightly upon obstructions which had been put in position a mile below Chaffin's Bluff, but this, which had no serious results, was the only mishap of the flotilla.

At Fort Darling, which had been the principal defense of the river approaches of Richmond for three years, another barrier was found. It had been the intention to take all the steamers up to Richmond, but rather than delay for the passage of the barrier Porter decided to go on in his own barge, which he ordered the tug Glance to take in tow. Above the obstructions the Allison, which had been the Confederate flag-of-truce boat, was found aground, having just come down from Richmond. It so happened that Admiral Farragut, who was on leave of absence at the time and who had been with General Weitzel at the entry of Richmond, had come down in the Allison, and at the President's suggestion the Glance was directed to assist in getting her off. In the effort the Glance also grounded, and the admiral determined not to wait for the tug, but to pull up in the barge. The result was that the marine guard of thirty men which had been

intended for the President's escort was left on board the tug, and his entry into Richmond was made only in the company of the admiral, Captain Adams, of the navy, Captain Penrose, the President's aide, and Porter's signal officer, Lieutenant Clemmens, of the army. These, with ten sailors from the barge, escorted the President through the streets.

Before they had reached General Weitzel's headquarters Porter had grave cause for concern. The streets of Richmond were quiet and comparatively deserted, but the party had no sooner landed and started on their way than Mr. Lincoln's conspicuous figure was recognized by an old negro slave near the landing, who fell at his feet with cries of "Bless the Lord!" "Hallelujah!" and "Here is the great Messiah!"

Porter thus describes the scene:

It was a touching sight—that aged negro kneeling at the feet of the tall, gaunt-looking man, who seemed in himself to be bearing all the grief of the nation and whose sad face seemed to say, "I suffer for you all, but will do all I can to help you."

Mr. Lincoln looked down on the poor creatures at his feet; he was much embarrassed at his position. "Don't kneel to me," he said; "that is not right. You must kneel to God only and thank him for the liberty you will hereafter enjoy. I am but God's humble instrument; but you may rest assured that as long as I live no one shall put a shackle on your limbs, and you shall have all the rights which God has given to every other free citizen of this republic."

His face was lit up with a divine look as he uttered these words. Though not a handsome man and ungainly in his person, yet in his enthusiasm he seemed the personification of manly beauty, and that sad face of his looked down in kindness upon these ignorant blacks with a grace that could not be excelled. He really seemed of another world.

In a few moments the slave was joined by others, who immediately began to sing in chorus the hymn, "Oh, all ye people, clap your hands," and before the sound of the hymn had died away the street was crowded with a dense throng of negroes, whom the handful of sailors had difficulty in keeping off in the excess of their exuberant joy and enthusiasm. The President and his small body-guard, all of them on foot, were barely making their way through the crowd, when they fortunately met a cavalryman on patrol duty whom the admiral sent in all haste to General Weitzel's headquarters for an escort. A few minutes later a troop of cavalry arrived and cleared the street, so that the President accomplished without further interruption his singular entry into the Confederate capital.

The President was received by General Weitzel, whose headquarters were in the house of Mr. Davis, the fugitive President, and who took him with the admiral to the State-House, Libby Prison, and the public offices which had escaped the conflagration of the day before. Late in the afternoon Porter was greatly relieved to get the President back safely on board the *Malvern*, which in the meantime had come up the river from Fort Darling and anchored at Rockett's. Here he passed the night.

Mr. Lincoln did not again go to Richmond. On Wednesday morning General Weitzel came on board, and shortly before noon the President with the admiral started down the river in the barge, the tug again taking them in tow. Arriving at Dutch Gap, the barge was rowed through the canal, and they rejoined the *River Queen*. The *Bat*, which had remained at anchor at Fort Darling, took up her place as convoy, and at half past three the President's vessel was again lying at anchor at City Point. :

On the following day the Malvern came down to City Point, and the President again took up his quarters on board. That morning Mrs. Lincoln had come back from Washington with the Secretary of the Interior, the Attorney-General, and Senator Sumner. They were transferred to the River Queen, which took them up to Richmond, the President remaining with Porter on board the Malvern. Here he passed two days.

But the end had now come. On the afternoon of Saturday, April 8th, the admiral took leave of his friend and President, in a last interview—the last, as they supposed, of their pleasant intercourse on the James River, but, as it turned out, the last that they should ever have. In the evening the President left City Point in the River Queen with the Bat in company, and proceeded down the river, arriving at Washington on Sunday night, and finding there the news awaiting him that Lee had surrendered. The admiral remained with the fleet to arrange for the patrol of the river. On Wednesday and Thursday he was completing his final dispositions with a view to his departure, which was hastened by a feeling of nervous apprehension for the President, the result of reflecting upon the risks which he had lately run. On the morning of Friday, the 14th, Porter finally left the Malvern, hoisted his flag on board the Tristram Shandy, and steamed down to Fort Monroe, from which point he hastened up the Chesapeake. In the hope that he might save time, he headed for Baltimore, intending to go by rail from there to Washington. He had no sooner landed on Saturday morning than he learned that his worst apprehensions were realized, and that the President had been assassinated the night before. To him, after the events of the past three weeks, it came like the loss of his nearest and dearest friend.

## CHAPTER XVI

### LATER YEARS

ON the 28th of April, 1865, Admiral Porter was detached from the command of the North Atlantic blockading squadron, and thus brought to an end his career of active service, which had lasted almost without intermission for over four years. Since his extraordinary promotion in 1863 through three grades, from commander to rear-admiral, he had received no special recognition for his services other than the renewal of the thanks of Congress. Late in 1864 Farragut had been appointed vice-admiral, Congress having created that grade for the purpose. On the 25th of July, 1866, further legislation created the grade of admiral, to which Farragut was again promoted, Porter at the same time being appointed vice-admiral in his place. The Act of 1866 was passed not so much to provide recognition for Farragut, who already had a distinctive position, as for Porter, who had received no advancement for his services subsequent to the Vicksburg campaign; and their relative position in the final arrangement was obviously due to Farragut's original seniority and to the priority of his initial victories, and not to any comparative estimate of the services or abilities of the two officers. That Farragut, who had been at the head of the navy when Porter was merely a commander—a difference, perhaps, more familiarly illustrated by the military grades of general-in-chief and

lieutenant-colonel—was entitled by this fact to the highest place was plain, and Porter was the last man to question it; and the grade of vice-admiral, though junior to that of admiral, was in its way as unique and distinctive, there being but one officer in each, and both having been alike created for the purpose of recognizing the most eminent war service. This accidental arrangement has not been without its effect on the popular judgment of the merits of the two great commanders.

On May 3, 1865, Porter was given a complimentary designation as a member of the Board of Visitors at the Naval Academy. This visit added to the interest which he already felt in the academy from the great number of its graduates who had served under his command; and three months later, on August 28th, he was appointed superintendent. He retained this position for four years. It was during his term of office as superintendent of the Naval Academy that he received his commission as vice-admiral, dated July 25, 1866. With all that Porter had done for the navy during the war, it can hardly be said that he ever did it a greater service than that comprised in his administration of the Naval Academy; and if he had had nothing else to point to in his career, he might have been well satisfied with the work that he accomplished during those four years, so eventful in the history of the institution.<sup>1</sup>

When Porter assumed command in August, 1865, the academy was still housed in the old Atlantic Hotel at Newport, whither it had been hastily transferred at the outbreak of the war. His first duty was to return it to its

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<sup>1</sup> A full account of Porter's work at the Naval Academy is given by Benjamin, *The United States Naval Academy*, pp. 261-283. Reference is also made to it by Commander R. Wainwright in *The World's Work*, July, 1902, vol. iv, p. 2272.



original site. The academy grounds at Annapolis, which had been occupied during four years for miscellaneous purposes by the army, had lost all their park-like beauty, its buildings had been used for hospitals, detachment after detachment had encamped upon its well-trimmed lawns, and the place abounded in sheds and booths for sutlers and camp-followers. The whole institution had become disorganized by the war, with its consequent abridgment of studies and rapid drawing off of students into active service. To reorganize the establishment, to infuse into it a new life, to create a new moral atmosphere, to provide in all material and external things for the well-being of those connected with it, to develop it from an elementary school run down at every point into a college worthy of the navy, to make its pupils a *corps d'élite*—all these things required a man of energy, wisdom, original judgment, and breadth of view, a man with a mind constructive as well as critical, and with a character and temperament capable of understanding and of wisely handling the five hundred or more midshipmen whose training and development were the object of its existence.

Porter was preeminently gifted with the qualities required by his office, and his administration marked an epoch in the history of the Naval Academy. He is the man above all others who made the institution what it is to-day, a military school fully equal to its older sister at West Point, and famous the world over for the high character of its professional training. The development of the academy meant also the development of the navy, and Porter's influence for good in its reorganization has been felt not only by the seven classes, numbering altogether over eight hundred midshipmen, who were fortunate enough to have more or less of their course during his term of office, but by all those who came after, com-

prising nine-tenths of the officers on the active list of the navy to-day.

Porter's first care on assuming command was to remove the traces of army occupation and to restore the beauty and external charm of the academy as it had existed in the old days. Large additions were made to the grounds, and new buildings were erected in rapid succession—the chapel, the cadets' quarters and mess-hall, and the steam-engineering building, with its admirable appliances for the study of marine engineering. The colonial mansion of the Governors of Maryland became the library, and the former chapel a hall of trophies, in which were placed the captured battle-flags of 1798 and 1812. Finally, but by no means least in importance, the old Fort Severn was converted into a well-equipped gymnasium. In comparison with the magnificent reconstruction of the Academy planned by Congress in these later years, Porter's buildings were of a sufficiently modest type; but the time was not then ripe for the monumental development of a later century.

In remodeling the course of instruction the admiral showed a clear perception of the necessities of the situation, and the way to meet them. The course was rearranged upon a logical and harmonious plan, in which the more strictly professional work was based upon a broad and substantial foundation of mathematical and scientific training. The most far-reaching change was the introduction of the theoretical study of mechanical and marine engineering in connection with practical work. A new standard of smartness and precision was set in all drills and exercises. At the same time the admiral gave every encouragement to athletics and other amusements. Under the old *régime* outdoor sports had been frowned upon and looked at with suspicion; now they were assiduously

fostered, and it was in Porter's day that baseball and other games were first introduced. The cadets were encouraged to use the launches for sailing, and rowing, both in man-of-war boats and in shells, became a favorite sport. The admiral approved of all rational sorts of amusement, and did not condemn the harmless frolics that lend color to the otherwise exacting routine of a military school. Not the least marked of the changes in the daily life of the midshipmen was to be found in the hospitality and easy intercourse at the homes and with the families of the officers, a change to which the delightful household of the admiral himself contributed in no small degree, and of which it set the example.

But of all the influences which Porter's many-sided nature exerted upon the cadet-midshipmen, by far the most vital was in the development of individual character and of the morale of the corps as a whole. Down to the time of his taking charge of the academy the attitude of the administration toward the pupils had been one of repression, of aloofness, and of suspicion. It was characterized by pettiness, and discipline was largely maintained by a system of espionage. Such a method of government was impossible to a man of Porter's frank and direct character. He had an unsurpassed knowledge of human weaknesses, and while singularly free from them himself, he had an innate sympathy for their victims. Though now in the prime of life and past fifty-two years of age, his heart was as young and as buoyant as a boy's, and for all his strictness as a disciplinarian he had a real consideration for a boy's feelings. His appeal to them was through that subtle and magnetic influence which is exerted by a direct and manly nature. He took them on trust; he believed in them; from his first contact with them he relied on their sense of honor, and nothing can

make a sense of honor more keenly alive than that. To him they were boys, but they were also gentlemen—gentlemen whom he was guiding and helping to take their place in the great profession to which he belonged. As gentlemen he accepted their word. He encouraged them to believe that honor was not to be the forced product of discipline and correction, but the natural and necessary outcome of the position in which they found themselves, as cadets who were being trained by their country for an *élite* service, and who in return were going to live up to their obligations toward the Government whose wards they were. Such a system and such a point of view could have but one result. The boys—for they were little more than boys—responded instantly to his influence, and the standard of manly honor established at that time has been maintained at the Academy ever since.

It would be hard to find a parallel in the history of any great national school for the exercise of an influence upon all that goes to make character such as was exerted by Porter and the men by whom he was surrounded on the staff of the Naval Academy during the four years from 1865 to 1869. All of them had come directly from active service in the war which was only just ended, whose battles and triumphs were fresh in the minds of all men. At their head was Porter himself, now created a vice-admiral, who shared with Farragut the honors of New Orleans, who had been for two years the great leader on the Mississippi, at Arkansas Post, at Vicksburg, in the Red River, and at Fort Fisher, three times the recipient by name of the thanks of Congress, the type of all that was best and highest in the service, the man who by his own deeds and by the force of his own character had attained to the summit of naval distinction and renown. With him came a large number of his young captains, the men

whom he had formed as he was now forming their juniors, the men who had stood beside him and who had commanded the ships of his fleets in the Mississippi and in the north Atlantic. Never has there been gathered together for such a purpose such a body of men as served under Porter among the officers of the Naval Academy—Selfridge, Walker, Luce, Breese, Ramsay, Fitch, Greer, Barnes, Dewey, and Meade—all young in years, but veterans in service, a gallant and brilliant staff. Not even the splendid traditions of the earlier wars, rendered vivid by the presence of their relics and trophies, and by the monuments of the heroic dead, could have roused in the cadets of the navy the alertness, the enthusiasm, and the *esprit du corps* that were called into being by the magic of that personal influence and contact.

In 1868 General Grant was elected President. He named as his Secretary of the Navy Mr. Borie, of Pennsylvania, a personal friend, who had no experience in public office and who had had no connection with or active interest in the navy. It was understood that Porter should be his principal adviser and should relieve him as far as possible of the cares and burdens of his office. When the new administration began in March, 1869, Mr. Borie was installed in the Navy Department, and a few days later, in accordance with the usual custom, visited the various bureaus. According to Dahlgren, Porter accompanied Mr. Borie in making his rounds, and on reaching the Bureau of Ordnance, of which Dahlgren was the chief, Porter, "stepping aside, told me that Grant said he should run the machine as Borie's adviser." This program was carried out, and during Mr. Borie's short service Porter, while continuing to be superintendent of the academy, passed much of his time in Washington,

where he was virtually the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Borie leaving to him the entire management of affairs.

The grades of admiral and vice-admiral in the navy had been created as a reward for the special services of two specially distinguished officers, and were not intended otherwise to be filled. In fact, at Porter's death they were allowed to disappear. The only admirals that the navy has had are Farragut, Porter, and Dewey. Appointment to these exceptional grades places an officer in a peculiarly marked position in the naval service. He not only occupies a rank apart from all his fellows, but one to which none of them in the ordinary course of events can attain. Such a position, if united with commensurate administrative powers, would virtually extinguish the ultimate civil headship, which is an essential feature of our military organization, both in the army and in the navy. It is not to be expected under the system prevailing in the United States, where the President is the commander-in-chief, and is represented in the detailed government of the service by the Secretary of the Navy, also a civil officer, that an admiral, holding in permanence this unique position, will ever take that part in administration which, if he took any part at all, would alone be suited to his exalted rank. Such has been the case with the officers who have occupied these positions in the past, and such will always be the case in the future. Even as to mere advice and counsel, an officer so placed is not likely to have so great a weight in matters of administration as the official advisers of the Secretary on the general staff or in charge of the executive bureaus. For the head of special boards and for the highest commands afloat he will always be eligible; but for an active part in general naval administration he has not been, nor is it likely that he will ever be selected.

It was for this reason that, after the war was over, Farragut found himself without an appropriate place in the general administration, and Rear-Admiral Dahlgren tells us in his diary of Farragut's annoyance upon discovering this embarrassment in his position. Under date of November 23, 1866, he said: "Had a long talk with Farragut. Evidently he is not consulted as much as he expects by the department, and is nettled by it." Another significant entry in the diary of the same period says: "Porter comes in. We had a long chat. He pitched in generally." The fact was that neither the admiral nor the vice-admiral could expect to take any large hand in naval administration except under a Secretary like Borie, who was willing to efface himself. Even then his office could only be that of an irresponsible adviser—an office likely to be productive of confusion.

Porter undertook during his brief period of administration in the Navy Department to become a reformer. He did not attempt to assume the responsibility for details of administration, but only to introduce changes upon isolated matters which he had specially at heart. For the conduct of administrative reform he had too heavy a hand. He had been too long in an autocratic position to be governed by the ordinary limitations of executive business. Nor was he content to make his reforms gradually. Although less than a dozen departmental general orders had been issued during the two years previous to the beginning of the new administration, there appeared over forty in the next three months, of all of which Porter was the author. Some of his orders were rather fanciful, some of them were ill-timed, and some were distinctly harmful. On June 28th, after less than four months of office, Mr. Borie resigned, and his successor, Mr. Robeson, was by no means satisfied to



have an officer performing his duties. The admiral thereafter gradually took less and less part in the direct management of affairs, and finally withdrew from it altogether. As president of the Board of Inspection, however, he continued in close touch with all branches of the service, and he was a strenuous advocate of the reconstruction of the navy, which was finally begun in 1882.

That Porter did not succeed better as an administrator is not remarkable, considering the haphazard character of his early training. Of education in the strict sense he had had but little. In his war service, and especially during his Mississippi command, he was always under the all-controlling necessity of securing immediate results, and his work had to be done with the imperfect tools which he had at hand—most of them no better than makeshifts. He did not care whether they were makeshifts or not, if he could make them answer his purpose. In the long-continued stress of active operations, this point of view and this use of temporary expedients had become habitual with him. They were imposed upon him by surrounding conditions, which they were well suited to meet—so well suited that without them he could not have succeeded at all. In his effort at a general administrative reform he fell into a somewhat similar point of view, and made the mistake of employing similar methods. This defect, however, was not peculiar to the admiral. It was shared by the navy generally. The period of fifteen years following the war was one of makeshift, of reaction, and of deterioration in the Navy Department, from the top down, and with a few exceptions in the whole establishment. The turning-point came with Secretary Chandler in 1882. But no act of Porter's during his brief tenure of power—or, for that matter, during his

whole life—was ever tainted by the slightest breath of scandal, from which some of the administrations of the period of decadence were by no means free.

In August, 1870, Admiral Farragut died, and as a matter of course Porter succeeded him in the office, being the only officer whose war service entitled him to a distinction side by side with his predecessor. While his nomination was pending, and with a view to prevent its confirmation, some person ill disposed to the admiral procured the publication of a letter written by Porter to Secretary Welles in 1865. It was marked "private," but it had nevertheless been placed upon the files of the department and was now brought to light for the first time. It was a confidential letter, such as the officer occupying the most responsible position under the department might write to the Secretary upon matters of common interest, of which the admiral wrote as freely as he would have talked. It was written while he was smarting under the annoyance of the first failure at Fort Fisher, the causes of which he laid at the door of General Grant. He was deeply incensed that the general, after their close association on the Mississippi, should have taken so little interest in the expedition and refused for so long a time to support it and give the necessary orders, and that he should have finally imposed upon it General Butler as a leader with an inadequate force of troops. It was a letter evidently written in the heat of the moment, such as may be found at times in the correspondence of almost any one of the great leaders during the Civil War. It was clearly unjust in its comments upon Grant, but it was never intended for publication, and it never should have been made a public record. It had no effect upon Porter's confirmation, and the President, with his usual magnanimity, did not allow it to disturb his friendly relations

with the admiral, or the opinion which he had formed and expressed of his merits as an officer.

When the difficulty over the capture of the *Virginius* in 1873 brought the United States to the verge of war with Spain, the entire fleet was assembled in the West Indies to be ready for hostile operations. Porter was selected for the chief command, his staff was designated, and his preparations were made to enter on another campaign. The difficulty, however, was adjusted, the fleet was dispersed, and the navy settled down once more to its usual routine. This was the last war-cloud to arise during the admiral's life, and from this time on his service was confined to the duties of the president of the Board of Inspection and to general reports and discussions of naval affairs.

During his later years the admiral devoted much of his leisure to writing. He produced several books, none of them, however, of any marked importance, for the admiral was not a man of letters but a man of action, and he had no faculty for literary construction or expression. The best is a biography of Commodore Porter, which gives the only complete history of his career, and is valuable for its account of the commodore's Mexican campaigns and other events of his later life. A gossipy book, called *Incidents and Anecdotes of the Civil War*, contains many amusing stories, but can not be regarded as a serious production, and it evidently was not so intended. The most ambitious of the admiral's works was a *History of the Navy during the Civil War*, which is unfortunately inaccurate in many essential particulars, including both dates and events. The book is rambling in style, and hastily and carelessly put together. Its value lies chiefly in its professional comments and its narratives of personal experience. The admiral also produced a volumi-

nous novel of adventure which was afterward dramatized. His literary occupations can only be regarded as a harmless pursuit in which he employed the hours of leisure in his declining years.

The last twenty years of the admiral's life after his return to Washington from Annapolis were passed in the historic house on H Street (No. 1718) which had formerly been the British legation, and which he had purchased shortly before he left the Naval Academy. Here he led a life of dignified ease, pursuing his self-imposed occupation of writing books, which was really rather an amusement than a task. He was free from the burdens of official care and responsibility, and with his family took an active part in the social life of the capital, in which he was a conspicuous figure. His hospitality was generous, and his household, to which the grace and cordiality of his wife gave a singular attraction, will be pleasantly remembered by all those whose privilege it was to know it intimately during this period. On New Year's Day the house was always thrown open for a reception, to which every officer of the army and navy in Washington made a point of going after leaving the White House. The last of the great receptions at Admiral Porter's house was on the night of March 10, 1889, when the admiral and Mrs. Porter celebrated their golden wedding.

Except for a few months of illness about 1880, which left no permanent effects, the admiral seemed to retain his bodily vigor until near the close of his life, the result no doubt of his active and temperate mode of living, for Porter, although rather exacting in matters of the table, always ate and drank sparingly. During the last years his heart showed symptoms of weakness, which culminated in an acute attack in the summer of 1890. He was at the time at Jamestown, in Rhode Island, where he had built

a country home a few years before. His condition was so alarming that his physician, Dr. Wales, lately the surgeon-general of the navy, was hastily summoned to his bedside, and for a time his recovery was almost despaired of. He rallied, however, under skilful treatment, and was later taken back to Washington. After his return he did not again leave his house. During the autumn and early winter he lingered, gradually growing weaker, occasionally recognizing and conversing with those about him, but most of the time in a state of semiconsciousness. On the last night he rested quietly on a sofa, his son Richard, who was his constant attendant during his illness, remaining with him. At eight o'clock the next morning, without regaining consciousness, he passed quietly away.

The admiral died on the 13th day of February, 1891, in the seventy-eighth year of his age. The great office of admiral died with him, only to be revived eight years later in the person of Dewey. He was buried at Arlington, in a spot which he had chosen the year before, and his death was announced by the President in a special message to Congress.

Three weeks before the admiral's death his old-time associate and comrade, General Sherman, happening to be in Washington, came to his house to see him. The admiral was sleeping, and Sherman would not allow him to be awakened. As he left his message of sympathy he said: "I would rather not see Porter unless I could see him as he always was when I knew him." He added, half in jest, to Mrs. Logan, the admiral's daughter: "I shall be the next one, and perhaps I may go before Porter." His words were prophetic, for he only survived the admiral by a single day. The two veterans who in their strenuous lives had so many times faced together the storm of battle, together entered into their final rest.

## CHAPTER XVII

### CHARACTER AND CAREER

PORTER'S work during the two years of his command in the Mississippi was not a kind of work that obtains popular credit or seizes hold of the popular mind in the same way or to the same extent as a single and purely naval action brought quickly to a victorious end. It made no such appeal to popular sentiment as Farragut's successes at New Orleans and Mobile, where the conflict lasted only two or three hours and the fate of the battle was decided in one magnificent dash, resulting in an important victory, the achievement of which belonged to the navy alone. The same sentimental advantage attached, though in a less degree, to Du Pont's victory at Port Royal, where the plan of action was not strikingly original or novel, but nevertheless well conceived and executed. So of Winslow's engagement in the Kearsarge, where the Alabama, which had been for two years literally the terror of the seas to American commerce in every part of the world, was destroyed and sunk in the space of a few minutes. So also of Worden's extraordinary action with the Merrimac, in which the Monitor, though she did not destroy, effectively resisted and practically neutralized her antagonist and put an end to the career of destruction upon which the Merrimac had entered, with Hampton Roads and the National fleet at her mercy. All these exploits, viewed in the light of

the surrounding circumstances, the intentness with which the public eye was regarding them, their sharp and sudden movement, their quick, decisive results, and their powerful dramatic accompaniments, secured for those who conducted them that popular distinction and applause which a great naval victory seems peculiarly to excite.

The naval operations on the Mississippi lacked most of these characteristics of popular impressiveness. They were too extended and too protracted, too complicated and confused for the public mind readily to grasp them. Even at this day, in the light of all the reports, it is no easy matter to follow and keep distinct the innumerable threads of the Mississippi campaign, with its flotillas steaming through overflowed valleys and its armies marching through dried-up swamps; its vessels moving, by an improvised back entrance, against forts on the upper waters of rivers which the same vessels could not ascend; its detachments of troops coming to the relief of gunboats which the enemy had imprisoned by cutting down the trees of the forest, and its gunboats coming to the relief of troops threatened by attacks from the interior; its divided squadron, partly above and partly below the besieged city, with the commander-in-chief alternating between the two branches of his command, not by means of a flag-ship, but by a short cut overland; and its subsidiary operations on the Red River, the White, and the Arkansas, the Black, the Tensas, and the Ouachita, the Cumberland, the Tennessee, and the Ohio. The fall of Vicksburg on the 4th of July, 1863, was indeed a mighty victory, and in results was second to no single event of the war; but it was accomplished only after efforts which had occupied the army, the fleet, and the public mind for eight long and weary months, during which innu-



merable disappointed expectations, unsuccessful or only partly successful plans, defeated expeditions, confusing combinations, encounters apparently fruitless and hope deferred had made the heart sick, and in which the work of the navy was dwarfed, if not overshadowed, in popular estimation by that of the army. Nor were the unceasing efforts which, during the following year, preserved the communications on the Mississippi and its tributaries and maintained the rivers at once as a secure highway through the heart of the enemy's territory and as an effective barrier to combinations of the enemy's scattered forces, of a character to call forth in the country at large the recognition they deserved. The Red River expedition was an escape from disaster, and, marvelous as was the resource displayed there by the admiral, as on all other occasions during his command, it is doubtful if he ever obtained his true place in popular esteem until after the fall of Fort Fisher.

Nevertheless, Admiral Porter, more than any other man of his time, combined in himself all the qualities that go to make a great naval commander. As an organizer, none of his contemporaries can be named in the same breath with him. In this, as in everything else, he looked at results. His two great objects were celerity and efficiency. He cared very little about methods. He was tied down to no routine. If he got the substance he did not greatly concern himself about the form. He knew the difference between essential and subsidiary features, and it was to the essentials that his keen eye was directed. It is not meant by this that he confined himself to large matters. Nothing was too minute for him if it had an important bearing on results. He had a perfect sense of logical proportion in the affairs with which he was dealing; and whether they were large or small,

provided they were important, he could give them the attention they deserved.

This faculty of taking in the whole of a large field of view at a single glance and at the same time giving minute application to essential details was characteristic of all of Porter's work, whether he was dealing with questions of organization or with the larger problems of strategy in the conduct of actual operations. He showed this first of all in his treatment of the great question of New Orleans and the lower Mississippi. Here the original conception was his, and it was by him that it was worked into practical and coherent shape before the commander-in-chief was designated. Even after this designation, his part in the enterprise was far greater than that of a mere subordinate. At the same time no detail of the operations which concerned his individual command was neglected, and the thoroughness of his individual preparations could hardly be surpassed. Again, in his command of the Mississippi squadron he showed preeminently the same faculty of combining the direction of great operations with a mastery of detail. To him was entrusted the entire control of the service afloat from Cincinnati on the one hand and St. Louis on the other to New Orleans, as well as on all the great tributaries of the Ohio and the Mississippi. Of all these operations, at points near or distant, he kept the threads in his own hands. He used his subordinates freely and confidently, but he used them as one who knew how to get the best work out of them, and he always knew what each of them was about. It is impossible, without extending the narrative to undue length, to give a complete presentation of the innumerable detailed operations of which Porter during these two years had the directing hand and for the conduct of which he was held responsible by the Govern-

ment. In the foregoing recital, which has been necessarily devoted mainly to the struggle around Vicksburg, the more remote incidents have hardly been outlined; but they required and received from the admiral a constant attention even while he was conducting in person a series of engagements which were enough to absorb all his energies. To the management of it all he brought a complete professional equipment, a thorough understanding of the matter in hand, a clear and rapid professional judgment, and a broad and robust common sense that could not fail to secure the most effective results.

Porter had shown during his previous career that as a subordinate he was a brave and capable officer, but there are many such officers who fail under the supreme test of a high and independent command. It was not so with Porter. His was a nature so well endowed as to meet successfully the final test. It was as commander-in-chief that his powers reached their highest activity. He had in him the essential qualities of leadership. He commanded men not by virtue of his rank, but by virtue of his personality, for in commanding them he dominated them; he infused into them his own spirit and made the force he commanded, as it were, a part of himself. Without a particle of conceit or vaingloriousness, he possessed an undisturbed self-confidence that carried him through every crisis. He never flinched before any responsibility, nor did he hesitate, when the occasion demanded, to risk his men or his vessels. He knew that there were occasions when risks must be run and even sacrifices must be made to attain results, and on such occasions he was always ready if the result was worth the sacrifice.

It was not merely as an organizer or as a strategist

that Porter showed his marked qualities as a naval officer. He was preeminently a fighting commander. He had the qualities of leadership not only in counsel, but in conflict. His dominating influence over other men reached its fullest effect at the critical moments of battle. Here the influence was little less than magnetic, and it was largely due to the singleness of purpose which guided the admiral's conduct—the overwhelming, absorbing purpose to get at the enemy and beat him—a purpose which in some subtle manner communicated itself to every officer and man in the fleet. So marked was this in Porter's temperament that the actual moments of fighting had for him an uncommon zest, which showed itself plainly in his high spirits and more intense mental activity.

It is in these moments of battle that we see Porter at his best, for here we find in its fullest development that extraordinary combination of a cool and even professional judgment, operating with arrow-like swiftness and precision in directing his entire force, with a most intense physical energy and activity. We see it at New Orleans, where Porter laid out and supervised the work of his flotilla with the utmost care during the six days of bombardment, always watchful and always at his post, and finally led his pasteboard gunboats close up to Fort Jackson and drew its fire during the passage of the fleet. We see it again in the brilliant action at Arkansas Post, where the admiral, with a tug for a flag-ship to give him greater facility of movement, was cutting in and out among the ironclads on the line of battle wherever his presence was needed, exposing himself with apparently no thought of personal risk, and using fearlessly and to the best advantage every vessel of his fleet. We see it in the passage of Vicksburg, where he steamed steadily down the river in the Benton at the head of the column, bring-

ing all his vessels through in safety after a terrific collision under the impregnable batteries that for nine miles crowned the bluffs. We see it again at Cane River, where he led the rear-guard of his squadron in another diminutive flag-ship, the Cricket, and ran the enemy's batteries, which riddled his vessel, he himself taking the wheel when the pilot was killed. We see it at Fort Fisher, where his unconquerable tenacity forced Grant to send out a new expedition after Butler's fiasco, and where his fleet pounded the fortress until hardly a gun was left upon the land face and the army were enabled to effect their entrance almost without opposition. We see it in all the other engagements where the admiral was personally in command on the spot: at Steele's Bayou, at Grand Gulf, and again and again in the frequent conflicts during the last weeks of the Vicksburg siege.

The admiral's success as a leader was partly due to certain exceptional physical and temperamental qualities. Perhaps the most comprehensive term to describe in a word his peculiar temperament is buoyancy. He was never discouraged. No matter how bad the conditions, no matter how much circumstances seemed to make against him, his spirits rose in adversity and carried him lightly over what would have been to other men the most dismal prospects of disaster. At Steele's Bayou in the spring of 1863, when to all appearances the entire iron-clad fleet was lost, and again in the Red River in 1864, when an equally grave catastrophe seemed inevitable, the admiral not only never faltered, but he appeared to all those about him to be in the best spirits imaginable. Upon both these expeditions he was leading in person, and he was not only keeping a general eye upon all his squadron, but actively fighting his own ship—whatever was his flag-ship for the moment. With this buoyancy

of temperament was combined such irrepressible physical energy that no matter how long the strain lasted—and it lasted a good many days in the Red River and came upon the admiral each day in a new and unexpected form—he never seemed to tire, his judgment was as sound and his body as vigorous as if, at each crisis, he had come to meet it from a period of refreshment and repose. As was well said of this exploit by one eminently qualified to judge: “I have always looked upon his escape with the squadron from the falling Red River as one of the finest pieces of seamanship, nerve, and judgment I am aware of in the annals of naval history.” As we read the account of that retreat, it is almost inconceivable that any man’s mind should have been fresh enough, as the days of calamity followed each other in rapid succession, so completely to dominate discouragement, lassitude, and bodily fatigue as Porter did during those trying weeks, when he not only kept the whole squadron in hand and brought it for the most part safely out, but himself conducted the most critical and difficult operations of single ships that were in dire straits. What admiral, for example, leading such a retreat as this, ever gave such time and attention to the details of operations as Porter did in his persistent attempts to save the Eastport? What admiral, without losing his control of the larger operations, ever went personally to command his rear-guard in such a flag-ship as the Cricket, and carried her through such a fight as Cane River triumphantly to safety? The best evidence of the admiral’s coolness and readiness of judgment under the most adverse circumstances, the *mens æqua in arduis*, which is the surest test of courage, both moral and physical, lies not only in the deliberate care and good sense with which each operation was carried out to a successful result, but in the impression which



the admiral during the period of trial uniformly made upon his officers and men—an impression deepened by the absolute recklessness with which he exposed himself to danger.

The contact on shipboard between officers, and between officers and men, is so close that very slight indications of manner are sufficient to convey the impression of an increase or diminution of nervous force, above all in a commander-in-chief. Not only the words, but the voice and the manner, the undue haste, the mental pause, the obscuring of the faculties—all these things meet with an instant response from every officer and man in a ship's company. Under such conditions, a commander who possesses that peculiar buoyancy of disposition which shows itself spontaneously, as it did with Porter upon all occasions, has already more than half conquered disaster. Not only was there in him an entire absence of bodily fear as well as of the drooping of the mind which comes from discouragement, but there was an irrepressible good humor, a positive exhilaration of spirits, at times an almost boyish jocularly, than which no more powerful lever could be imagined to strengthen the faint-hearted and to rouse the faltering spirit.

In external appearance Porter was of middle height, but perfectly erect, not apparently from conscious effort but from natural poise. He was a large-boned man, with a capacious chest, but his well-knit and muscular frame, free from all superfluous weight, gave him an appearance of sparseness. His head was large and erectly carried, with a high forehead, a strong aquiline nose, and large dark eyes, singularly penetrating and dominating in their expression. The lower part of his face was covered by a heavy dark mustache and beard, which in later life became tinged with gray. The impression made by his coun-



tenance as a whole was that of tremendous power ready for instant action; yet his expression was far from being austere. There was always about his eye a suggestion of good humor, almost of merriment—but it was a twinkle that it was never safe to trifle with. His presence was commanding, and the impression of force conveyed by his face was borne out by the natural vigor and alertness of every movement of his limbs and body.

Whatever effect Porter's physical presence produced was accomplished without artifice. He was absolutely without self-consciousness or personal vanity of any kind. His manner with other men was remarkably free from any accentuation of the difference in rank or position that might exist between them. This was equally true whether the men with whom he was in contact were his superiors or his subordinates. Although brought up in a profession where every man has his place in the hierarchy, and where he is always in company with those who are either distinctly above him or distinctly below him in rank, his manner toward them all was equally simple, natural, and direct. Cringing and domineering were alike foreign to him. He had nearly reached his fiftieth year before he attained more than a subordinate rank, but his intercourse with his superiors during the whole period, while never presuming, was marked by the same simplicity and directness that he showed with his equals or his subordinates. No one, however exalted his position, ever induced in Porter any shadow of hesitation, or shyness, or nervous tremor. On the other hand, when, as vice-admiral of the navy and superintendent of the Naval Academy, with a name that had been again and again on the lips of all his countrymen, he was seriously admonishing a cadet-midshipman in his office or putting on the gloves with him in sport in the gymnasium, the

same simplicity and directness marked his external manner. It was a manner bred of a manly self-respect and self-confidence. No doubt among the rather pompous commanding officers of the period before the war there were many who did not relish it and who would have preferred to see a greater subservience and flexibility in their junior, yet none could fail to recognize the force and self-reliance of his character.

Porter's directness of speech was only the reflection of his directness and straightforwardness of character. He was of the class of men who are born honest. It was from this trait that sprang his impulsive frankness of expression, which not infrequently carried him beyond the bounds of prudence—witness his reckless talk at the club in Newport in 1862, which came near spoiling his career, and the Grant letter in 1865, which he had such cause to regret. As is apt to be the case with such natures, the expression often reflected only the feeling of the moment, which another moment might find radically changed, and the changed feeling might find an equally frank expression. Hence the apparent inconsistency with which the admiral is justly chargeable. The fault—and fault it certainly was—became all the more serious because of the forcible quality of the admiral's modes of expression. He always had a ready command of expletive, which he did not hesitate to use. But apart from that, his language, whether of discipline or of controversy, was terse and emphatic, and there was a pungency about his criticism or reproof that brought the matter home to the meanest understanding.

There has been occasion from time to time to comment upon the peculiar quality of humor which formed an essential part of Porter's mental make-up. It was a curious vein of humor, almost sardonic in its character,

never malicious, but rising at times to the level of an impish audacity. When the admiral, lying above Vicksburg, constructed his dummy monitor out of a raft, with pork-barrels for a smoke-stack and a mud furnace belching forth volumes of smoke, and sent her past the batteries to draw their fire, it was hard to discover whether he took more interest in the scheme as a strategic operation or as a huge practical joke. As the former, it was successful enough to justify him in projecting it; for not only did it disclose the location and character of the Vicksburg batteries, but the panic which it created below resulted in the abandonment of the captured Indianola. In the Red River, when the captain of one of his iron-clads reported to the admiral that his ship was sinking, and that he feared that he could not extricate her, Porter merely hailed him in reply, "All right, only be careful and don't sink her in the channel." But at the same instant he set measures on foot to insure her safety, as a result of which she was actually saved. During the bombardment of Fort Fisher, as he was rapidly inspecting different ships, the enemy discovered his presence on board one of them and immediately made her a target, a fact of which her captain in consternation hastened to inform him. "That is good," was Porter's reply. "Come up on deck and see what kind of a mark we make." When one of the captains before the attack represented that he ought not to go into action because his vessel was out of repair and likely, if struck, to sink at her anchors, Porter replied: "You are just the man I want. We will tow you close in to the beach right under the fort, and when you sink at your anchors you will sink in shoal water, and you can lie on the bottom and give the enemy hell!" In his written instructions for the passage of the Vicksburg batteries the admiral had directed the captains

to report on board the flag-ship after the passage. Before the action, as was his custom, he had all the captains on board for a final talk about the plan of operations, and at the close of the interview he jocularly said, paraphrasing his instructions: "When we get through, the survivors, if any survive, will report on board the flag-ship—if the flag-ship survives."

Perhaps there was nothing in Porter's character that more endeared him to his officers than this jesting, easy way of taking the most perilous situations. Nothing is more contagious than such an example in a commander-in-chief. Even when the admiral's jocularity took the form of occasional "guying" of the captains, they did not mind it; and if, as was apt to be the case, the "guying" was about one-third in jest and two-thirds in earnest, they knew it would be well for them to give it the most respectful consideration. Once, in the Cape Fear River, after the fall of Fort Fisher, a young captain who had been with Porter in the Mississippi, and whose name has occurred several times in these pages, was visiting the flag-ship and incautiously criticized the movements of one of the gunboats at that moment hotly engaged with the Confederate fort above. "Young man," said the admiral, "go right up there with your ship and show us whether you can do better." And the young man immediately obeyed the order. Among the captains was one, an officer of great gallantry, whom Porter had placed in command of one of the eight divisions of the fleet, but who had a fondness for constructing hypothetical questions and putting them to the admiral. Porter for a time met his inquiries until they became burdensome from iteration, and finally, in reply to an oft-repeated question as to what the admiral would do under certain given conditions and in such or such cases, he said, in his half-jesting manner:

"I put you as commander of division because I thought that if you had one of these questions to answer, you would know how to answer it when it came. All I have to say is that when the time comes to use your judgment you must use it; and if you do right, you will hear from me damned quick; and if you do wrong, you will hear from me a damned sight quicker!"

One of the most marked features in the admiral's official relations was the generous spirit in which he gave commendation to his subordinates. He did this in no perfunctory or conventional way. He took up his captains by name, and mentioned about each one some distinct fact to his credit. He never was afraid that this recognition of others would at all reduce the credit to which he might personally be entitled. In fact, his reports, as far as his own acts are concerned, are singularly free from the personal element. It is perfectly clear from simply reading them that when the admiral was composing them he was not thinking at all about himself. Take, for example, his report on the Vicksburg campaign already quoted. Often he went to an extreme in his concession to others of the credit for the work that had been accomplished. Thus, in speaking of his three division commanders, during the attack on the New Orleans forts, he says: "I left the entire control of these divisions to themselves, trusting implicitly that they would faithfully carry out the orders which I had given them previous to the bombardment. . . . The end justified my confidence in them." The fact was that during the entire bombardment Porter was constantly on the spot, looking personally after every ship and allowing nothing to escape him. A hen could not be more watchful of her chickens than Porter was of the mortar-boats during those eventful and laborious days and nights of the

attack; yet his report would almost justify the conclusion that he had left the management of the flotilla entirely to his divisional officers.

It is curious to notice the difference in this respect between Farragut and Porter. Farragut was likewise a man of great generosity of disposition, but he was more than sparing of commendation in his despatches. Compare his report of the battle of New Orleans and of the operations that resulted in the capture of the forts with that of Porter; hardly a captain in the fleet except Porter himself is mentioned by name with the slightest note of praise. The splendid performance of Bailey, who led the van in the passage of the forts with a gallantry that went far to insure its success, was not only ignored, but through some strange inadvertence the impression was given that the original order of two columns, one of them led by the flag-officer, was actually carried out; and Bailey's career was virtually ruined by this unintentional misrepresentation, which contradicted his own statements, and which was only corrected years after the war. Farragut, though richly endowed with all the qualifications for professional success, was essentially a modest man, retiring and self-distrustful. Porter, on the other hand, though unassuming, was self-confident, self-reliant, filled with the courage of his convictions, full of resource, full of constructive imagination, and with a strong faith in his ability to carry out his plans. Nevertheless, when it came to the treatment of brother officers in official reports, Porter was unstinted in his enthusiastic praise, while Farragut by his silence sometimes left a wound in the mind of a deserving officer, which years failed to heal.

During his Mississippi command Porter always encouraged the fullest and freest intercourse of his captains with himself. Among other peculiar phases of naval life



in the Mississippi squadron, the admiral had horses and even a cow stabled on board the Black Hawk, and it was his practise when in company' with other vessels of the squadron to ask the captains on board to supper, which generally consisted of mush and milk—an illustration, by the way, of his temperate habit. These gatherings were of the most informal character. The plans and methods of the campaign were familiarly discussed, and if anybody had a suggestion to make, he was free to make it, and Porter was glad to receive it, and, if he thought well of it, to act upon it. It is no wonder that captains who were placed on such a footing were ready to follow the admiral in any enterprise. His mode of training—for his intercourse with his officers was nothing less than this—was to make them acquainted as far as possible with the outline of his plans, to develop and stimulate their individual qualities, and to give the fullest play to all that was original and resourceful in their mental composition. He knew well the tendency of the service to make mere routine men, to cast officers in the same mold as parts of a machine, and his aim was to counteract and neutralize this tendency. He had a large contempt for slavish subservience to routine, and the most cordial appreciation of an original mind capable of independent thought and self-reliant action. His officers knew well that if they did a good thing, or even made a good attempt at a good thing without succeeding, they were sure of his approval. And when to this quality of appreciation was added a broad and deep human sympathy that established at once a close personal relation between the commander-in-chief and those to whom he looked to carry out his orders, it made a combination than which nothing is surer to develop the highest abilities of captains in action. This fact helps in no small degree to account for the remarkable



character of the captains who served in the Mississippi squadron, which included not only men as diverse in their mental and professional characteristics as Walker and Greer, Gorringe, Ramsay and Phelps, Selfridge, Bache, Walke, Pritchett, Fitch and Breese, but a host of volunteer officers whose only naval training was that of the Mississippi squadron. It is no derogation to the high qualities of these officers to say that their success as a body was largely due to the commander-in-chief who created them. Their qualities were no more the accident of the situation than were those of Napoleon's marshals, or of Nelson's captains, or of Preble's lieutenants at Tripoli, who afterward became the captains in the victorious actions of 1812.

Reference has already been made to the complete harmony of action which existed in the Vicksburg campaign between the admiral and the commanding officers on land. The Mississippi squadron, although commanded from the first by naval officers, was originally a mere branch of the army, having been placed under the orders of the commanding general. The complications resulting from this arrangement under which, as Admiral Foote said, "every brigadier could interfere with him," were brought to an end by the transfer of the force to the Navy Department on October 1, 1862, the date of Porter's appointment to the command. The fact that the field of operations of the squadron was a great network of rivers in the heart of the country, and that it had already for more than a year been subject to the orders of the commander of the army, was almost certain with any ordinary commanding officers to develop friction between the two branches of the service. With Porter nothing of the kind ever happened, and his relations with Grant and Sherman, the two officers of the



Grave in Arlington Cemetery.



army with whom he came most in contact, were harmonious from beginning to end. This fact was recognized by General Grant in a letter to Captain Ammen in 1864, where he says: "I think Porter, Phelps, and some of the younger officers as clever men as I ever fell in with. I can not complain of them certainly, for I never made a request of them that they did not comply with, no matter what the danger. I know I caused Porter to lose one gunboat [referring to the Cincinnati] against his judgment, and he never found fault." He might have added, as a still more remarkable fact, that Porter never found fault with either Grant or Sherman for the failure of army co-operation in the Steele's Bayou expedition, which nearly caused the loss of the squadron. In fact, it was immediately after this expedition that General Lorenzo Thomas, the adjutant-general of the army, coming out to the Mississippi with a discretionary authority to relieve General Grant of his command, was dissuaded from exercising it largely through the remonstrances of the admiral. Porter had the same harmonious relations with most of the other army officers with whom he was called upon to cooperate—Terry, Schofield, A. J. Smith, Steele, and others. There were three, however, for whom he had from the start a strong antipathy, which he was at little pains to conceal. These were McClelland, Banks, and Butler. With the first he had little to do after the battle of Arkansas Post, for McClelland became only a corps commander, and was relieved of his command by Grant during the siege of Vicksburg. With Banks, to whom he attributed the failure of the Red River expedition, and Butler, who was certainly responsible for the ending of the first movement against Fort Fisher, he became involved in public controversies which, in the case of Butler at least, it was impossible

under the circumstances to avoid. In neither case was it a question of friction between the forces ashore and afloat, for a fairly harmonious cooperation was maintained at the Red River until the close of the expedition, and at Fort Fisher Butler merely landed his troops and immediately reembarked. The controversies had no material bearing upon Porter's career, and neither Banks nor Butler will be regarded in history as having contributed in any material degree to the military operations by which the Civil War was brought to a successful close. Certainly nothing that either of them ever said or did can affect the place which Porter is to occupy in naval history.

In private life Porter was a devoted husband and an indulgent father. In society he had the distinction and ease of manner that come from birth and breeding, aided by long contact with the world on its social side, and long familiarity with the ceremonious surroundings of official life at its best, both at home and abroad—and that, too, notwithstanding his occasional incisiveness of speech on the quarter-deck. But besides the qualities of the polished officer and man of the world, there were about him and his talk, in the ease of private or social intercourse, a directness and conviction, a breezy good-nature, and an inexhaustible flow of high spirits that lent to his society a captivating charm. Dana, whose judgment of men was not over-indulgent, says of him at Vicksburg: "Porter was a very active, courageous, fresh-minded man, and I enjoyed the visits I made to his fleet."

It is not surprising that less observant critics sometimes mistook Porter's high spirits for trifling. He certainly had as a younger man a genuine out-and-out boy's fondness for skylarking, which he never entirely outgrew. But the qualities that gave rise to it, so far from interfering with the real activities of his life, were among

the strongest factors in his professional successes—as they were also in his literary failures. In fact, his books, especially his books of fiction and anecdote, can best be regarded as an outlet for the latent boyishness in his many-sided nature.

The opinions of Porter's Mississippi captains upon the qualities of their commander-in-chief might be thought too indulgent or too enthusiastic to pass as expressing the cool judgment of his contemporaries. It would be hard to find one who would admit that as a commanding officer Porter had any superior. Perhaps a more impartial testimony is that of Admiral Ammen, a remarkably competent observer, who was not connected with the Mississippi squadron and who had no close personal friendship with Porter. Admiral Ammen says of Porter in his memoirs:

He was a man of indomitable energy and courage, knew how to organize and command men, and, what is quite as important, saw to it that he had the necessary supplies and munitions without which a force soon becomes inefficient. He was generous in his instincts and desirous of doing justice to every one under his command—a feeling which is, in fact, almost universal with great leaders of men whether afloat or on shore.

Ammen also relates that being asked by some one his estimate of Porter: "I said that professionally I regarded Porter as the ablest officer we ever had afloat in command of a large force;" and he added, with a little touch of irony, that, if Porter's own opinion could be given, "it would be found that he thought well of himself as a sea-captain, but that he considered his strong point to consist in his ability to write despatches and letters."

Another officer, whose opinion is of great value not

only because he was free from any bias of personal association, but because he was one of the soundest judges of professional merit in the service, the late Rear-Admiral C. R. P. Rodgers, regarded Porter as the foremost commander that our navy had produced. In comparing him with his leading contemporaries, Admiral Rodgers found none that united in himself such a variety of important professional qualities in so high a degree. But the most noteworthy testimony is that given by General Grant himself. When the second Fort Fisher expedition was under discussion he wrote to General Terry: "I have served with Admiral Porter, and know that you can rely on his judgment and his nerve to undertake what he proposes." These are strong words; but stronger still is the mature and deliberate statement made by General Grant at the close of his career, after his presidency had terminated and he had retired to private life. "Among naval officers," said the general, "I have always placed Porter in the highest rank. I believe Porter to be as great an admiral as Lord Nelson. Some of his achievements during our war were wonderful. He was always ready for every emergency and every responsibility."



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